KUMAR GANDHARVA

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Preface

This book has taken a lifetime to get written. Over the years, randomly, the material for this book got collected. Not because any of us who knew Kumar and felt the epochal implications of his art that his life presented thought that it needed necessarily to be documented in a book; but that it needed to be understood for its own sake.

It was, we felt, in this understanding that we would understand ourselves. Even to get a grasp of what and why he was the kind of man we believed he was needed time, a whole lifetime of time. Very few people could meet Kumar Gandharva or spend time with him without unknowingly asking those crucial questions about Kumar that lie at the back of everyone's mind.

The first time that I was turned in this direction was when in the early 1950s I met Padmavati Shaligram who was an ardent admirer of Anjani Bai Malpekar. Padmavati recalled Anjani Bai telling her that if any one practices Swara Sadhana and reaches anywhere in the practice, that person is almost never likely to become a professional singer. The mysterious detachment from performing some singers developed after reaching great heights in the art has always seemed to me to be somewhat odd. All interest in performance would die in a few years time if this Sadhana was performed literally, even in some cases brutally, she said. That is, of course, one of the reasons why Gurus omit to teach this aspect of Hindustani classical music and turn evasive about it, in the ordinary course, to their children or to their wards. The Swara Sadhana aspect of music seems always to have resulted by happenstance in most cases where evidence of it exists, and seems to have been achieved always in a rebel mode. A running away from home or some other dramatic gesture of protest has always been involved in the exercise. In some households the practice *of* Chilla achieves the same purpose without the need to run away. The running, in such cases, is achieved by a ceremonial withdrawal from life. In Kumar's case this was achieved, in a certain sense, by his long illness. The straight-line instruction by the Guru is always Raga Vidya, relatively easy in contrast to the perils and uncertainties of Swara Sadhana. There was no peril, or fear, or stress, or failure in Raga Vidya. You acquired it and you practiced it. And that was that. J checked this out with Kumar bit by bit here and there, at various locations, once or twice on train journeys when I travelled with him on a few occasions, or after a performance at: someone's home or in my own. Also, during two long interviews in which I had the happy task of translating what he said to American scholars who were studying what was romantically called "the secret of India", several times — of one or two hours each time — with the late Walter Kauffman, one time in the Ashoka Hotel on a day when Aldous Huxley and Laura Archera Huxley were visiting India and I had the pleasure of introducing Kumar to Huxley as India's Amadeus Mozart. "It is the brow," Huxley had said, "They have the same kind of brow," They shook hands arid Kumar also did a Namaste and later I explained all about Huxley to Kumar. The late Hirabai Barodekar too gave me several was a gem of a man, particularly because he had such a low level of self-esteem, and had

many insights which lowly domestic helps pick up about their employers without quite knowing the significance of what they knew. I had also the good fortune to meet Nambiar's nephew Kochan, who lived in Trivandrum and read a few of the letters Nambiar had written to him about his employer. By that time Krishnan Nambiar had passed away. These letters were tender statements on Kumar's musical stature and presence in the household he served, of a sense of mission he had that there was a vital role that he was fulfilling there at Dewas, cut off from his roots in Kerala. In one of his letters he mentions how it is important to be lonely in life and not seek redress in company. That unless a man is absolutely and resolutely alone he cannot achieve much within him and it is this making of a man that he is watching at the bedside of Kumar Gandharva.

I had questioned Kumar about what had actually happened at the home of Krishna Rao Majumdar in Dewas. His description of the event seemed like a theophany, something like what happened to St. Paul on the Road to Damascus, sudden, obliterating, and final. I also discovered in several of these sessions that Kumar had certain convictions that were not open to debate; the knowledge, not a belief, that man's destiny was irrevocable and that if we only knew our path through life it would be the easiest thing to know this simple truth about our existence, no matter how difficult it may seem when judged from a social point of view. This was another strange and compelling finding about Kumar's essential spirituality. The whole thing called life, he believed, was one piece, not made up of random parts or seemingly disjointed by the absurdities of the social culture we inherit, or the peculiarities of the habits which are the substance of our lives. Fear would be among the first to disappear from our lives if this bit of truth were discovered. This was something that simply had to be known, and after knowing it there was nothing left to be done but fulfil one's appointed tasks.

I here have been several memorable moments in the years I had known him as when the time that I was writing the life of K. L. Saigal and I told him about it. Kumar sang the Khyal *Jhulana Jhulaye* in the Raga

Dev Gandhar and the Hori in Kafi that began *Hori Ho Brij* right there without any accompaniment, not even a harmonium, right there on the sofa in the drawing room at the home of Dr. Karan Singh where he had just finished a concert. The verisimilitude was eerie and gave me goose bumps. It was complete in every detail, even the points in the song where Saigal drew breath. But Kumar was not imitating. You felt it in the way he manoeuvred his memory of the song. He remembered every nuance in it and faithfully reproduced it in the same way, as he must have those songs from the gramophone records of his childhood, exactly as he heard them. He was not mimicking. That was the point. The song was his and Saigal's at the same time.

I consider this early meeting with him and the way I saw him ever since as a bit of an impediment to write on him. The problem with my generation of men and women who have been even remotely connected with Kumar and his music is to produce the illusion of detachment between the writer and the subject of his writing. This is a personal predicament. But it must be pointed out that an Indian classical musician's life has never been easy to document even under the best of circumstances. There are several reasons for this. One of these is the nature of the art itself. Indian music is largely a process rather than a finding. It does not conclude at any stage. It is difficult also to scholasticise the art without forfeiting its essence. It has several social values and inherited paradigms in it

but these do not belong in the art, but to the society in which it lives. Quoting the many ancient Granthas, the Dattilam or the Ratnakara and other authoritative texts would only make a musician smile at the sheer naiveté of it. This is among the reasons why in Hindustani music what is often called the Establishment is relatively weak. That is, the influence of a wide body of consensus on style and technique and expertise and other aesthetic elements is slight and this makes it difficult to administer the art in the ordinary sense of the word. In the Carnatic tradition, on the other hand, this is somewhat easier to do. The inheritance of fully composed Kritis, notated down to their last breath and sigh, and of singing Saints, the practice of precisely calibrated Gamakas and the relative freedom from the impulses of the Spoken language and dialects help to sustain a certain measure of gentle supervision on the emerging face of Carnatic music.

This kind of overall watchfulness will be meaningless in Hindustani music. This is among the reasons why the life histories of Hindustani classical musicians have a certain fey quality about them, a nimbus of unreality that hovers over their lives, and after the passing of the musician takes on the muted glow of fable. To some extent this is because of the nature of Raga, of the way the Ragas of the Indian musical inheritance are ordered and the way they play their part in Hindustani classical music, — the belief, for instance, that Ragas have a certain kind of life in them. So that the inheritance of the Ragas is not a science nor an art for they are organic, transcending both art and science.

It is because of the fact that Hindustani classical musicians live their lives almost submerged in the world of Ragas that when their lives are examined exclusively along their lengths, in the realm of sequence alone, the meaning of their lives is vastly diminished. It is in the breadth of time that these lives are best measured for it is there that meaning is deepened and subtly layered across each life. For, consider a musician's life. It has very little of mere length to it. He does not have a batch year or a stretch of promotions through seniority and there is no point of retirement when through a kind of common consensus he would be considered to have been snuffed out, unless he managed an extension or got himself alternative employment of a similar kind. Such measures of a linear passage are meaningless in the life of a musician who lives with certain timelessness as part of the calendar of his existence.

It is in this sense that the historical part of a Hindustani classical musician's life is trivial and inconsequential in the context of that inner journey which is the true content of the man. Kumar's life and art should be considered as somewhat epochal in Hindustani classical music. Like the end of a glacial age when the ice is said to retreat into streams, rivers and oceans and the covered land stands revealed freshly shaped and sculptured, ready once again to unfold a new history, Kumar's arrival in the Indian musical world should be considered to have set the stage for a different level of the spiral of musical evolution. Even for those who used to listen to him with a certain reservation in his early years, he had a shattering impact. Over the years whenever we met or spent time together the conversation in retrospect would seem to have run down and become an interview despite the fact that there was not the remotest intention at that time, or even for years afterwards, to write about him. The problem was that everyone everywhere was trying to figure out the mystery which he embodied and searching for a clue to Kumar Gandharva the man, and there seemed to have been no way out of this predicament.

Kumar had always been a musician who caused comment, dismay, admiration, wonder, befuddlement, and also a certain kind of despair because Kumar embodied more than any one else in our times in the field of music that impenetrable mystery which *is* there within every human being. This became more obvious after Bhopal became the artistic hub of a vast and mysterious cultural hinterland where Kumar has been amongst the most discussed, analysed and researched men among Indian musicians.

There was little doubt for those who watched him closely even in those far-off days that Kumar was destined to look for music's source. The problem, as always, was where was this source located. To hazard the guess that its source was folk seemed merely to be a grand statement. It was not possible to prove this through any kind of Gayaki then extant.

The great Bade Gulam Ali Khan of the Patiala Gharana had in an interview in which he sang examples showed the close link between the folk and the classical but his own music did not intrude into the folk domain nor add to itself folk elements except in the Thumri Anga of his Gayaki. Kumar went a great deal deeper into the intonation and language of folk music. It is possible that the compulsory musical silence that Kumar had to undergo due to an illness triggered off the final plunge into the realisation that folk alone can connect our music to the living quick of vital inspiration. With hindsight it is possible to say today that all his life the agony and the restlessness with which Kumar hunted after content as distinct from form could only have led him where it eventually did.

Nowhere else could he have found this connection except in the psychic depths of his race, those novel forms, those new shapes and feeling and those novel forms, those new shapes and feeling and those sudden insights into the nature of language except in the open heaths and moor lands of Malwa's countryside, his own neighbourhood, a far cry from that little apartment in Cadell Road in Bombay, hard by Shivaji Park, where he thought he could live. Finally, folk is universal, it girdles the globe and is everywhere spiritually identical. Nourished from the same sources, direct and unmediated by scholarship, ratiocination or mere intellect, ready always to be transformed by someone prepared to receive it.

It was like a meteor that he passed across the Indian sky and cut in his wake the body of Hindustani classical music into two neat halves; one half before Kumar Gandharva and one half after him, a kind of a B.C. and an A.D. in Indian music. In the succeeding chapters of this book we shall examine the magical opening up of a man from one tradition to the building of another.

I owe a special word of gratitude to my friend and companion of a life time, Shantaram Kashalkar, with whom I have spent hours of my early years as a student of his father Pandit V. A. Kashalkar, discussing Kumar's essential message to our time and age. The immensity of the work done at Bharat Bhawan under the leadership of Ashok Vajpayee on all manner of art, and the performing arts in particular, and the special area of research on Kumar Gandharva's life and work that the Bhawan has steadily conducted for several years has been a mine of information and insight without the use of which this book would never have been written.

1. Shadja

In his opening remarks at a concert in a quiet Delhi suburb a few years before he passed away, Pandit Kumar Gandharva said that he proposed to sing the Raga Kalyan and not the Raga called Kalyan of which he said there were several allotropic forms. Kalyan he said was the feeling in the Raga and this could be produced in a variety of ways through manipulating the scales.

Among Kalyan's many hundred Bandishes the Bandish that begins *Banare Balaiya Aaj Suhag Ki Raat* is perhaps the most portentous and moving. It is art old Khyal and you can find it in Bhatkhande's volumes. Few singers sing it any more unless they are old, and also slightly old-fashioned. Kumar himself used to complain that its Mukhda was too long. It is however a prodigious piece of musical architecture lying along the length of the Tala, coiled like a Boa, smooth and keening with life and when the Antara begins with the words *Chandra Badana* and makes a heart-rending meend to the Gandhara, which in Kumar's voice seemed molten like the inside of a dying star, it is to complete this heady Khyal's fated passage that ends slowly with the words, *Mukha Tambola.*

On this occasion Kumar began with an extended Alap which we had rarely heard him do except perhaps as though he were taking the wrapper off a Raga but whose gait had already told his listeners that this was the Khyal he was planning to sing, made to the measure of the Tala in which it was composed with large breathing spaces between its words which let in the mystery of Kalyan's inner heat. He kept this up relentlessly till he had lit a whole forest fire on the Gandhara and the Rishabha so that he could sit in its solar glow and sing you the Khyal I described above.

It is difficult to sing Khyals if you do not love the language and know by an inner assurance the lyrical weight of each of its words; the count of consonants and the vowels on which the Tala turns its face and form. Kumar used the words *Banare Balaiya* like a giant key to open the throbbing interior universe of the Khyal's text and when the last words, *Mukha Tambola* came rising out of the meaning of the composition it was like life itself coming to an end with the promise of another birth

Then he sang the Tintala *Kinare Kinare Dariya* and packed it with Taans, little sprays of them that merely wet your face like condensing fog-leading on to the Tara Saptak Rishabha that lit Kalyan's world with an eerie glow.

Then he sang a few Abhangas in Marathi in several Ragas like Kedara, Sindhura, Kafi, Mohini, and so on, laying out a whole buffet of nourishing canapes crafted in subtle Tintalas, Kehrwas and cunning little Bhajans spelling out the magic of language and Raga in bright bouquets that you carried home with you wistfully.

The Kumar Parivar was present on that occasion; both Vasundhara Tai and daughter Kalapini who framed and mounted random phrases freezing the memorable passages. There was that day Kalapini's husky contralto and Vasundhara Tai's rich exits and entrances that were unforgettable.

Three years later almost to the day, he was gone finally, irretrievably. He could have gone any time ten years earlier, even thirty years earlier. He had been on the brink of

death while still in his twenties and had been saved miraculously. Thereafter all those who admired him and marvelled at him considered him as though, in some strange way, always on parole; as though once having been engaged in a mortal combat with those intimations of life's perishability and then earned a reprieve.

At every concert all his life, whenever he appeared after a short or a long interval in India's major cities to sing, his admirers watched his face for tell-tale signs of fatigue or strain or even a touch of fancied oedema, a faltering step, a passing cold, a rasp in the upper Shadja of an Anandi that he had just begun to sing. They would then frown and fidget and shake their heads and try to forget. That was the way Kumar lived. As it happened he did not after all die too young. He had several years though of singing time left in the essence of his life. His voice was still velvet, it still hissed and changed its interior levels, like a fish swimming at various depths of the sea. Its husk was still plaintive and he was still looking for other landmarks beyond the state of his art at the time.

This inner state could have given him at least another fifteen years of active singing life. But this was not to be. Life obviously had another agenda and is finally sovereign. He had lived long enough to test out for himself many of his life's findings and proved them all to the satisfaction and dismay of his generation. He had only grown more whole in himself and not become a merely clever man put together from parts. He, like the Ragas, and the worlds which he opened up through them, was its own proof. It was at the height of his faculties, after he had for years exhibited the tranquillity of a man who had fought his way through a long and arduous inner journey in which the landmarks that he had discovered became the voice of the inheritance of his country, that he called it quits. So that today when we hear a sudden Bhajan through the beloved accents of Meera or Kabir sizzling for utterance in a musician you think of Kumar, the Kumar of the reborn Nirgun, that he had fashioned out of the dregs of his own life.

In the 1930s and the 1940s when Kumar Gandharva was casting about trying to find a way out of the dilemma of his own life, every one who heard him sing or were in any way drawn to Hindustani classical music had a sneaking feeling that this child was a little weird. That he was called a prodigy was the least part of his existence. He seemed, even in those prescient times, pointing in a direction that did not exist in the art before his time, towards a new and mythic landscape.

To understand Kumar Gandharva's place in Hindustani classical music it is important to know the place Hindustani classical music itself enjoyed in the country at the time of Kumar's advent and the grasp Indians themselves had of the art's true place in the culture and its meaning and impact upon the life of man in this subcontinent. Without this preliminary enquiry the impact of Kumar Gandharva upon the evolution of Hindustani classical music would be trite and incomplete.

To believe as we wish to do, particularly after the British told us all about nationhood, that Hindustani classical music was popular at any time in its history, or indeed that it was an art that was much loved and admired across the country is to be naive. It was not. Unlike Western music this music never belonged to a country that understood it, nor to the whole of it, nor was it part of a shared way of life in a common endeavour of discovery and attainment. It had never been in a public sense an awareness of the self of a

people, of its history, or of time. Think of Wagner in the context of the Third Reich, or of Beethoven in the context of Napoleon and you will know what I mean.

Music in India was largely suspect. Its impact was felt to be subtly undermining and disruptive. So people trained themselves to keep it at arm's length, said nice things to its face socially, but never dared to go near it. The music obviously never went to the people either. We have no social apparatus, like a tempered scale, nor community activities like a church which collects a Parish every Sunday and makes them sing a song in tune together as though in one voice, so that when a person goes off-key he is not called unmusical, but ill-mannered and badly brought up.

Even as late as the 1930s, and until broadcasting and the films took over, there was very little hard music in the life of the common Indian. Music survived mostly through happenstance among a handful of Maharajas of what the British called the Native States, some odd zamindars and landlords, and a few petty chieftains. Music at that level of society was intrinsically bound up with the show of wealth, of the lounging, easy life and the exercise of power, and its principal format was the Baithak. It was in this format alone that it evolved its well-known body language, all those *Daads* and the Wah-Wahs with which even today its pathetic feudal foundations are extolled and affirmed.

Everyone who remembers those years of Indian classical music will remember how hard it was to learn this art in the early years of the twentieth century. Almost anyone who had a true regard for this art had to learn it in secret, or run away from home in order to possess it. The names of such runners are legion. Offhand, consider the names of men like Bhimsen Joshi, the great Shehnai player Bismillah Khan, the Sarod player Allauddin Khan, the disturbing Kundan Lal Saigal, the finely-honed Harish Chandra Arulekar. These are relatively recent names. Think of the thousands who went before them, centuries before we turned historical and stopped mythifying any one whom we could not fully grasp and began to write their names down and began also to learn from their example. In the history of Hindustani classical music it was only the great Moghul Emperor Akbar who seems to have truly loved the art for its own sake, for his own delight and growth and not for anything as phony as the greater glory of the Moghul Empire.

This was a surprising event for the music, the phenomenon of a monarch so sensitive and alive, loving an art as esoteric and baffling as the Hindustani classical music tradition There is no evidence that the monarch was in any way embarrassed, at least in any obvious manner, on account of this strange sensitivity in his nature and in his court he openly endorsed musicians, and revered and protected them from the snarling, savage world around them.

Hallowed names like Gwalior, Agra, Rampur, the Jaipur Atrauli and Seheswan Vishnupur, Pariala or Benares, we may like to remember, were not academies of music even if they were called Gharanas, institutions like the Dutch Conertbeow, or the Santa Cecilia in Rome, the Royal College in London or the Juilliard in New York. These were minuscule families, minute cellular organisms in the Indian gene pool, almost threadbare in their impoverishment and penury, surviving exclusively on the nourishment of a mysterious and unaccountable trust, joined to a passionate faith in the transforming essence of the art.

It was in this sense that Kumar Gandharva caused much more comment and curiosity before he became a full-fledged musician than after his admirers began to see him against

the landscape of the conventional inheritance and tried to place him for their own private measuring against that grid. The great Malayalam Poet-Laureate Vallathol who established the Kerala Kala Mandalam had heard of Kumar from sources of current gossip and had gone to hear him at a Shivaji Mandir concert in Dadar, Bombay just about the same time I think the Second World War had been declared. The poet had been hard of hearing and perhaps knew even less or very little about Hindustani classical music. We must remember too that that time was not this time. Our timid social order used still to encourage us to divide the single unassailable inheritance of the Raga on which the art of Indian classical music inheritance was based into two, naming them the Carnatic and the Hindustani traditions. Later when this despicable habit went far enough to divide the country itself into two, on religious grounds some people who were sensitive to the disquiet of meaning in life, took a double take and quickly clammed up and said nothing.

Pandit Narayan Rao Vyas was to conclude the evening. Vallathol heard Kumar in rapt silence and said later that he thought the Raga he had sung was Suddha Saveri. After which the poet went on to discuss the curious quality of the boy's art and the implications of Karma and predestination in life. Was it the vestigial accumulated memory of the effort to know, made over several life times, which at any one time appeared wrapped and hidden as instinct? What was it, he asked? It would appear in the public domain as mere temperament, as an indefinable urge to feel and use all the five senses personally and not as the social order demanded, so that the person saw and heard and responded for himself. Something was being carried forward, of that the poet was in no doubt. And also that Kumar was not just a great singer who had embarked on a journey of his own but was also in a way a *Kai Katti Maram,* a sign post.

These questions continued to concern the poet during his short stay in Bombay and he would return to the subject of Kumar Gandharva off and on whenever he was troubled with the questions Kumar raised unwittingly by his mere existence. To desire to look away from men like Kumar Gandharva when they appear on the horizon is a natural reaction of the human being not wanting to be reminded of the existence of his own essence, the poet would muse. It was a horrifying responsibility of awareness to carry around throughout a whole lifetime robbing us of our natural right to our share of our natural need to forget and claim our right to Maya. There is very little doubt that a great part of Kumar's life was spent in devising means by which he might return to the source of his own being. That he found what he had searched all his life is borne out by the many hundreds of Bandishes he left behind him, a legacy which was one of the most formidable musical inheritances of Hindustani classical music in the twentieth century. This music needs singing, demands exemplars and not scholars who can read score. That Kumar sang and established these Bandishes and new Ragas over the many years of his active singing life and made them a part of the musical experience of his generation was what gave his life the meaning, the force and the drive of a latter day Moses who could be visualised as standing on the shores of a musical River Jordan and parting the raging stream midway to make a pathway for the safe passage of the mysterious inheritance of the Gharanas so that he could show them a glimpse of the Promised Land.

2. Rishabha

No Indian life, however undistinguished and ordinary, can be truly said to exist if a chart of the heavens as at the time of birth has not been cast. Without the fated coordinates of the stars and planets at birth, the events of life however seemingly significant will seem always to be on the flat without depth and contour. A life whose existence is supported only by a date and a year on the Gregorian calendar is, in the Indian perception, as good as nonexistent even if this date is reinforced by *a* passport and an identity card.

The force and vitality of a culture can be measured only by those who love it madly, examine it most critically, and regenerate it most fiercely for themselves in each generation so that the culture can be said truly to belong to those claiming to be born in it. Most of us know that the Indian inheritance has never been examined critically and held up to the light and assimilated with the awareness of its true nature, and therefore has never been claimed fearlessly each for himself over the centuries. A culture that has not been claimed does not exist except in the mind. The general indolence and heedlessness that characterises the human species has had the most grievous consequences in the Indian context. The original principles of the inheritance never having been critically examined and understood over several millennia since they were deemed to be sacred were never truly possessed. Intelligent and critical grasp of its inhering principles was substituted by blind faith, which was called Bhakti, and Bhakti without understanding mocks the essence of the inheritance. The Indian inheritance of astrology belongs in this genre of faith although astrology was never concerned with belief in a future but was intended to enable it

There are two extant versions of Kumar Gandharva’s horoscope built from slightly differing almanacs and many distinguished astrologers have studied it at various times. For a man who in his lifetime had spawned more seminars and discussions on his art and life-thrust than any other single musician, an astrological assessment however seemingly outlandish in our fiercely Westernising milieu becomes only an additional dimension to grasp the mystery of the lived life.

When I showed one of these versions of Kumar’s horoscope to the late B. V. Raman, Editor of the internationally acclaimed monthly, *The Astrological Magazine* published from Bangalore he was getting ready to leave his office to attend a conference on Egyptian Astrology. The chart was lying face up on his table where I had placed it perhaps for a minute as he stood up to adjust his Angavastram. “This man is an avatara”, Raman exclaimed, “Who is he?”

I told him that the chart belonged to one Shivaputra Komkali. The name obviously did not ring a bell. He glanced at it again, looking and marvelling and said among a few other things, “This man has been through a great deal in his life, has triumphed over death to get what he was looking for and went on to triumph over himself.”

A more accurate gist of Kumar’s life could not have been made in what seemed a matter of minutes, a startling analysis of a complex man and the truths he found for himself in his life. Raman continued: “This man’s rising sign is Leo as you can sec with Jupiter in Moola Nakshtra with an exalted Saturn in Libra giving him a mind that penetrates appearances and goes into the essence of all manifestations and an eighth house which has a vile conjunction of Mars and an exalted Venus and the Sun which robbed him of his wife and also made him face death and turned him into an explorer in a

difficult and esoteric art in which he occupies a lonely peak of self realisation. Who is this man? How is it that I have never heard of him?”

I said nothing at that time. This kind of man who may read an astrological chart is not interested to know whether I thought the general statements he had made were true or false. He was in the thick of several meetings. I could not have chosen a worse day to interest him in a casual chat on the merits of an unidentified horoscope 1 had placed on his table. An American from Butte, Montana, was waiting in the lobby to see him and a woman dressed like a Banjara with a glass globe in her hands sat next to him.

For the nonce however let it be said that Shivaputra Siddharamaiah Komkali, who as a child was named Kumar Gandharva, was born on 8 April 1924 in a place called Sulabhavi, a little Shaivite village a few miles from Belgaum on the Belgaum-Goa Road. The epithet Shaivite or Vaishnavite are mere words, just labels for one of the many among the complex divisions of the Hindu social order. In actual fact it means only that the man and his ancestors in the village, as far as can be personally known and transmitted, have been worshippers of Shiva and have been known in the village to be so, for more years than any one can easily remember. Kumar was born in this category and belonged in the sub-caste of the Purohits. By this statement also nothing specific or significant is meant in terms of life as then lived. There were thousands of nondescript Shaivites in the country and also Vaishnavites and many other religious categories of random worshippers, cultists, tantriks, magicians, acrobats, jugglers, and snake charmers all belonging to the many traditional social divisions of Hindu society. The point is that he looked to those who were familiar with the physical characteristics of Hindu castes, a Shaivite.

Walter Kauffman who was present as a guest of M. R. Jayakar at the now well-documented Jinnah Hall concert in Bombay in which Kumar sang, said, “A stripling of a lad he was, perhaps eleven or so but looked about seven in spite of his elaborate disguise of cap and long coat. What he really looked like was a Shaivite in the bud apart from his musical gifts which was a little weird”. What he meant was that Kumar had that curious refinement and aristocracy of toilet, a freshly bathed look joined to the subtle vigour and austerity of presence of the bathed Brahmin of the Indian inheritance. Many years later when Kumar would sing a Hamsadhwani or a Shankara you knew what Kauffman meant when he said that Kumar was a natural Shaivite.

If you went to Sulabhavi where Kumar was first born — he was born once again much later in life, a more profound and illuminated rebirth, it looks like any other Karnataka-Maharashtra village with the usual bamboo groves whose fresh tendrils are bent to the ground at day break, rising steadily as the day warms to a height of several feet above the ground. There is the village pond, slightly green with fresh algae and throbbing with fish, two or three wells where the women gather giving and taking news, the Shiva temple whose chimes you can hear as far as the mustard fields in the distance.

I he worshippers in the temple know that while doing the Pradarshana of the Lingam the circumambulation takes care not to cross the Yoni. Very few Northern temples understand the meaning of the pause and return to the original point. In this sense Sulabhavi is a Southern village. It has the gloom of the many trees that cover the village from all sides. In summer there is plenty of Koyal sound calling from tree to tree,

incessantly all day and well into the night which flicks your mind from its current concerns into another dimension.

Kumar grew up in this village. Today the thunder of the highway which is not far and the roar of the traffic that passes at the edge of the village have changed the character of the village where once there was plenty of silence, the sound of wind and rain, in all of which Kumar took a strangely poignant delight.

It is this wordless delight in the passing of time, the colour and the feel of life that animates most of Kumar's Bandishes and his approach to Raga. Take the Khyal in Raga Tilak Kamod in Jhaptal, *Tirath ko Saba Kare Deva Pooja Kare.* This is an old Khyal but when Kumar sang it, it seemed to shimmer with the level light of a sad evening near some unnamed river bank. It was this Bandish that made the late Krishna Chaitanya exclaim at a Sangeet Natak Academy concert that Kumar's Bandishes seem to be shot in Technicolor. The Kabir Bhajans on the other hand are laden with the monochrome of timelessness. A flat, non-geographical sky somewhere between the temperate latitudes and the tropics, a sky that seems to fit like a lid over the darkened landscape of despair and loss. Where is this place, you asked yourself, as you listened to that reproachful voice whose timbre Kumar used to describe as the stuff of Shunyata which is described in the

Bhajan in Mishra Khamaj which begins with the lines, *Kaun Thagwa ye Nagariya Lootey Leho.* The Bhajan fairly bristles with the feeling of the transience and perishability of human life and this is achieved more by the voice rather than the lyrics of the Bhajan.

Later when the riotous Holi festival at Indore would fill his spirit, and he would sing a sudden Bandish in Bhoopali sounding corn-yellow in his voice of the moment, you thought of that area of Madhya Pradesh with its gentle hills and domesticated temples, perched on hilltops of sheer rock, an affirmation of a whole cultural grasp in a musician that made him ring true for his time in an altogether novel fashion.

3. *Gandhara*

It is difficult to get a measure of Kumar Gandharva as a man and a musician without some prior grasp of the essence of India, its culture, and its place in the world. You cannot think of Kumar outside the Indian milieu. For example, he could never have been a pianist or a Pavarotti. In order therefore to understand his art we have to stand a little apart from the events of his life, which is its mere calendar, and examine the musical inheritance from which he had sprung.

The hidden agenda of the Indian view of life is spiritual. This is based on the assumption that the spiritual and the material are one and cannot be divided and any knowledge of the material world must subsume the existence, without any discontinuity, of the other.

This is among the reasons why the Hindu seems to have little or no interest in other people's beliefs knowing that all beliefs are finally false until they become experience after which they are no longer beliefs but become truths. This is one of the principal reasons why other cultures call Hinduism tolerant. The Hindu never feels threatened by other beliefs and holds any belief as good as any other and finds no urge to choose between competing beliefs. In this milieu, all crafts and arts are conceived in such a manner that its learning and practice gently subverts the mind towards the spiritual

essence of all existence, kindling it in various ways so that the training and the practice of it transforms the student in subtle ways over the years. Among the many arts and crafts of the subcontinent the Music of the Raga is perhaps among the most potent in this sense.

There are several characteristics of a special kind that the Raga possesses which make it possible for it to act as one of the most powerful transforming agents in the life of any one who aspires to possess it. For example, the Indian inheritance has never attempted to develop a tempered scale like the piano upon which to base its Saptak. The basic unit of the Indian scale is the Swara and not the Western note, which is a sound, based on the frequencies of a tuning fork. The Swara on the other hand is a personal utterance. It is this element in the inheritance, which pre-empted the possibility of the art at any future time in its history breaking free from the landscape of a student's inner world. This becomes over the years a disquieting spiritual domain whose texture and configuration is in fact the principal ingredient of Raga. The Swara, which is the unit of the Indian musical scale, is as esoteric a concept as the Holy Grail of the Christian Church.

Broken down to its Sanskrit roots, the root Swa refers to the inner self of the student, the resident deity that inhabits all created things, and the root Ra which refers to a shining out of this inner self. In combination the word Swara would mean the radiance of the inner self and this is the essence of the Swara. It is because of the fact that very few people are aware of anything inside of them to which they can attribute their sense of self except as a bunch of appetites to which they give their exalted names that the musical discipline is directed firstly towards creating a passage within the student towards his inner into Sadhana rather than merely work at the practice of their art. These men and women have a strange and indescribable quality in their voices and presence, a subtle authority and power which leaves a lasting impression of something unaccountable in their art. This unaccountable element in the musician, which keeps him a little beyond comprehension, is the first hint of Sadhana and at the same time was the principal reason why music was kept at arm's length by the Indian middle class for centuries. The practice of Sadhana in any work liberates the practitioner in numerous unaccountable ways but Sadhana achieved in music is so assertive that a person who has worked in this area becomes somewhat remote and distant from the principal concerns of the social order to which he belongs. The problem is not that such a person becomes a reactionary or a rebel. The problem is that he does not. If he were to become a rebel it is easy to administer such a man but a person who is largely indifferent to the preoccupations of the social order to which he belongs is a predicament, which is much worse than being a rebel. You cannot reorder this man, or give him another set of priorities He is beyond the reach of society, which was among the reasons why a subtle feeling of hostility exists between lovers of music and the practicing musician. This predicament produced a vast schism between the art and the society in which it had its being. It was at this juncture that two savants and evangelists of music, Pandit Vishnu Digambar Paluskar and Pandit Vishnu Narayan Bhathkhande took the music out of the shadowy confines of the Guru-Shishya Parampara and fashioned a novel window into the world of Hindustani classical music. Thousands of compositions were collected from diverse Gharanas scattered all over the North of India and these were nutated after a fashion and then assembled in books by these two remarkable men. This one act made it possible to bring the music into the curriculum of the school and college educational system, which the British were trying to incorporate

into the life of the country. The Ragas were rationalised into Arohas and Avarohas, into Vadis and Samvadis, and those subtle keening notes that are called Pakads.

Before this happened it was not as though musicians were not aware of these characteristics of a Raga's nature. But the difference was that they did not teach the Ragas through them.

In a certain sense this development made it possible to establish an alternate technique of teaching music, which for the nonce took less time and seemed on the face of it to have sidetracked the Guru after a fashion. Suddenly the music became accessible and students flocked to study it in the schools that began to offer courses that mimicked the other disciplines in the new educational establishments that were sprouting up all over the country. The system offered two-, four-, and six-year courses that led to degrees and diplomas and the prospect for the first time of a career in music that offered regular salaries and retirement benefits and other considerations that did not earlier exist in the art. Added to these fundamental changes in values was the new technology of sound recording HMV brought into India establishing its works at Dum Dum near Calcutta. Dum Dum which began to record classical musicians on shellac discs and began feeding them into the market. A new world had come into being. Hindustani classical music began to be noticed and affirmed. It is with this event that the life of Kumar Gandharva came to be bound.

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If Kumar had been the standard version of the music-loving boy whose parents wanted him to learn music there were many avenues even in those times through which such an ambition could have been fulfilled. But he was not. Kumar was born with a supernatural memory.

He could, what was called at that time, mimic through his voice not

merely a rough facsimile of a recital he had heard, but reproduce a three-minute record of any of the well-established musicians of the day with a fidelity that made his singing of them seem like musical photographs. Considering the number of years that these musicians had spent in mastering their art, this eerie facility of a seven-year-old lad seemed miraculous.

Almost instantly Kumar became a rage. Everyone, everywhere, wanted to hear him. Beneath the Hindu mind lurks the strange and compelling question of rebirth which lies at the core and centre of his spiritual inheritance and which haunts his daily life even when his mind is not dwelling on it- People who had no interest nor understanding of music also came in hordes to hear him and look upon him, searching for tell-tale signs of predestination. If Kumar had at that time exhibited any idea of the names of Ragas or Talas or the intricacies of compositions he would merely have been a precocious child like the many prodigies that appear with a certain regularity in Carnatic music; children who are three or four years old and who still lisp when they speak but equipped with what seems to be a superhuman knowledge of the techniques and structural characteristics of Kritis and Kalpana Swaras, the ability to recognise and name the Ragas from merely listening to their Arohas and Avarohas and the Kritis and name the Talas in

which they have been composed but Kumar did not exhibit any of these familiar symptoms. In fact, he had little interest in the names of Ragas or those items of technical knowledge which baffle the establishment in Carnatic music. If he had had any idea of Ragas or of Talas this ability would have been put down to mere precocity. Alas in the case of the child Kumar Gandharva it was not an ability that could be quietly classified, named and then forgotten. He disturbed people who heard him a bit too much. There was a quality about this precocity that was more than the mechanical ability to retain, remember and connect. It was a strange and indefinable resonance in his art, an inner thing, a matter more of his nature rather than a skill which he had managed to discover in himself. This characteristic takes a quality of uniqueness in the context of the mass of material that Kumar left behind as Bandishes. This is because it is the Bandish which alone has a nearly objective existence in the saga of Raga Vidya.

It is in this context that the Bandish of Hindustani classical music becomes probably among the most intriguing and challenging musical and literary devices ever discovered in the history and experience of Hindustani classical music. But this has never occurred as though straight in the same line, head on. Not having been ever literally composed like a Concerto or in the way a melodic resolution sometimes seems fated and inevitable like, for example, the descending cadences of Ave Verum Corpus the Bandish has always been in a certain sense given the impression as though it had merely happened. It was because of this quality that the Bandish gives the feeling of becoming rather than sound like a fully structured composition, a musical artefact. For even its seeming structure changes from age to age, even some times every decade, and even within the family and in the same geographical area. But make no mistake; the Bandish has a tough literary and musical core, hidden like a filament, within a musical DNA that holds the Bandish as real as any objective, physical, musical fact. It is this quality of lyrical expression that gives the Kumar Bandishes their folk-like delight in their utterance, an unreal dream-like air. The Bandishes are redolent of this dream, in Yaman, in Hameer, the Malhars. Consider *Abeer Gulal* in Bhoopali, or Shankara in which the Bandish begins, *Sar par Dhar Ganga* in which the Swaras surge like a spreading flood in the land, or Tilak Kamod where the Bandish *Motha Gulab* glows like a seed pearl in the evening light, or the wistfulness of *Amona Re* in Durga. The folk world of Malwa in Kumar’s Bandishes is a new world and has its own sunsets and sunrises and the brooding silences of noon day. This world was born through the temperament of Kumar which was built, Swara upon Swara, out of the substance of the agony which must accompany every new birth.

This characteristic of Kumar’s mind set even as a child, a complete indifference to any kind of mechanical response or a child-like delight in mere information, provides a vital clue to the path he took in his future years, the reason among other things for that internal restlessness and dissatisfaction with which he looked around and within him for answers to the fundamental question of why he was born. In actual fact he had resolved these issues in his mind well before he was bedded down by a near-fatal attack of tuberculosis for nearly six years. The suffering involved in his sickness was not what made him into a musician as many of us at a certain time wished to believe. He had become a true and complete musician long before he fell ill. It was the level of his art that changed after his illness. The sickness gave him; in addition, new and living material with which to sing, a refreshingly new repertoire to build on, and another language which branded his identity over the many decades of singing that followed his illness.

4. *Madhyama*

There is plenty of material in the public domain on the arrived Kumar Gandharva, the Kumar of Dewas. But there is not quite enough information on the young Kumar Gandharva of Sulabhavi, not quite ten years of age, setting out on his voyage of discovery under the care of the late Professor B. R. Deodhar.

The Komkali family was a family of singers. Kumar's father Siddharamaiah Komkali was a well-known name and so was Kumar's elder brothers. They gave performances all over Karnataka, in many of its towns and villages, places like Belgaum and Hubli and Dharwar.

The child Kumar was never known to have had any interest in singing, in fact when he suddenly broke into song one day no one was more surprised than his father.

Ganesh Phanse who was the son of a postal employee in Bagerwadi not far from Sulabhavi was Kumar's age and was his constant companion until Kumar left Sulabhavi to serve his apprenticeship under Professor B. R. Deodhar. The two boys would roam about all day in the woods and fields of that Shaivite village of the 1920s. 1 first met Ganesh Phanse at Kumar's home in the 1950s, in the house that stood on the edge of the Bombay-Agra road before Kumar bought the land on which Bhanukul was to be built later, a little ways away beyond the reach of the main town, under the shadow of a Devi temple. Phanse was at that time visiting Dewas and staying with Kumar. I had called on him briefly on my way, *en route* to Hyderabad. Kumar was right in the midst of his illness at the time, bed-bound and coughing up morsels of his lungs. Phanse had joined the GIP Railways as a driver of the electric trains that ran between Victoria Terminus and Kalyan, and having later retired lived near the Keyes High School in Marredpally in Hyderabad, where he died in 1994. I used to meet him once in a while in those years that Phanse lived in Bombay and we would then talk about Kumar or he would give me a ride with him in his cabin and once showed me the Deadman's Handle which is held down by the driver and which when released stops a train if the driver were to suddenly die. I used to ask him random questions about Kumar's childhood. This was not because I had ever contemplated writing on Kumar Gandharva at that time, nor even at any time later until the drift of his life began to compel another way of considering him. Kumar was a curiously different kind of man. Even if you did not have the slightest interest in the mysteries of Hindustani classical music you would still look at him and wonder at his presence which had something sure and secure in its knowledge. The fact that he had become a famous singer was the least of the reasons for this wonderment. It was Kumar as a person. He had this quality all his life. Phanse used to say that after he joined the Railways he rarely met Kumar, as he was neither particularly interested nor understood classical music although he kept a rough track of this companion of his childhood and his meteoric rise to fame.

Phanse once said that Kumar had two sides to him, only one of which he revealed to his friends. Within him, Kumar was a deadly serious and focussed man, a grim seriousness that would halt any one in his tracks by its sheer unreachable inwardness. An easy way to bring this element of Kumar's nature into the open in those days even

while he was still a groping young man, was to ask him for a Raga or a Bandish which you would like to hear him sing. If that Raga or Bandish was not in his mind among the Ragas or Bandishes that he had planned to sing for that evening, he would neither say yes nor no to your request, but would not sing your request. This was not because he wanted to slight your feelings or in any other way wanted to cause you hurt or embarrassment. The reason for this was that Kumar's Raga world was a peculiar psycho-spiritual realm, hardly of the nature of an art that he had learnt and acquired. It was a mystical universe with which his internal bonds were beyond the power of his words to describe or explain. Considering the way he came into music, in a certain sense hurtled into it by forces he could neither comprehend nor explain, an attitude of this kind is not entirely difficult to fathom, especially in the context of the path he eventually took in his art. Kumar was not particularly articulate at expressing his true feelings about any subject, particularly if it meant too much to him in the sense that it was more than he could bear. Ragas belonged in that realm. He could never fathom their mystery, the power they had over him in his inner world, even in his sleep and in his waking moments. So he said nothing, and left people to think whatever they liked to think about him. Some thought he was arrogant and superior; others that he was after all a musician and was therefore bound to be eccentric. But the true reasons no one could ever know.

The ordinary body language of feigned humility, the desire to please for the sake of public adulation and all those social bits and pieces of casuistry all of which are part of our inheritance were beyond his ability to mimic. He left those things where they belonged in the world around him. He did not care whether there was one, two, ten, or a thousand listeners assembled to hear him. He was equipoised, the same everywhere and wherever. He came to sing on the dot of the time given to him and a few minutes before his allotted time was up you could hear him collect all those loose ends of his performance into a single unbranched statements like an aeroplane coming into land, the aileron dipping, the wings tilting to turn and align, and almost on the dot of the appointed time, he would land on the runway of your mind three hours after he had begun to sing. His engines would then be switched off and you would hear his Tanpuras slowly die down into silence. He sang for himself to his own standards and for the music he embodied. For the rest, he cared nothing.

Even while Kumar was quite young, for his friends he had the *Maje me Hai* level of answer to life's principal questions. This came through his cherubic, smiling presence complete with his Supari slicer and his happy laughter. Phanse used to visit him in the depths of his illness when he would find Kumar's bed sheet scarlet from his own lungs, but there was never a whisper of complaint or fear in him of the possible danger to his life that he was obviously facing. People often smilingly say that Streptomycin would seem to have been discovered to save Kumar Gandharva's life, or that no greater life was saved in this century through this drug. This, however, would be only half-true. Kumar was saved principally by his own implacable sense of destiny. This was an obvious part of his personality if you stopped thinking of him only as a musician.

Phanse recalled how when they were both children in Sulabhavi, Kumar would seem to have a happy acceptance and delight at everything around him and in particular to the physical environment of time, of the feeling of Sandhya, of noon, and of night, a nearly mystical response to the changing seasons, or to the feel of the slow drops of rain blowing through carried winds, or the sound of invisible birds in the hedge rows and trees

of his village. Phanse felt that Kumar always knew that he was going to be a musician but had not quite decided when to reveal this irrepressible urge to his family. His silence up until the moment of his sudden revelation as a disquietingly gifted singer seemed almost to have been a deliberate decision he had made within himself, and not the consequence of the unguarded innocence of a child. But what surprised Kumar beyond belief was not his ability to sing but the response he had on those who heard him. For that he was not prepared. He had not thought of his singing a song, from one of the records which his father bought and played on what was at that time called a Victrola, a particularly significant achievement. All he thought he was doing was that when he heard a song, he sang it as he heard it, the best way he could. The thing called Victrola was an ungainly contraption with an enormous brass-coloured horn for amplification, a turn-table lined with felt and a winder for the spring. Phanse once described how when the spring would sometimes wind down and the song would descend pitch and tone Kumar would playfully imitate the falling pitch down to a bass growl. Most of the records that Kumar heard in his childhood were from Marathi Natya Sangeet, from plays like *Maanapamaan, Soubhadra, Swayamwar* or the songs of Nandi and others, which most Maharashtrians even in remote villages could hum to themselves or sing. The fact that Kumar could also sing some of these songs was not the puzzling element in Kumar's breaking into song without warning. It was the way he sang them. There was a polish to it, a curious inner force and assurance that seemed vastly different from the idle mimicking which most ordinarily gifted children were capable of doing reasonably well.

This his musician father at once recognised with a pleasure that was not entirely free from a certain disquiet. Almost as soon as Kumar began singing, his father and the rest of the family stopped doing so. Kumar was a gold mine, a phenomenon. That he would be among the most significant singers of this century seemed a foregone conclusion. It needed a little work, a slight rearrangement of the old value system, a good Guru for the child, and the road seemed clear. Kumar was taught, more or less in a hurry, the basics of the art and thereafter a life of hectic travel and concerts became the way of young Kumar's existence.

Like any other child blessed with an unaccountable faculty Kumar used to enjoy the adulation and surprise he created in the minds of his listeners. It was as 'Kumar Gandharva and Party' that Kumar travelled all over Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra, singing in Indore, Nagpur, Hubli, Dharwar, Bombay, Pune, Satara and many other towns and villages of these states. So that by the time Professor Deodhar heard him and Kumar's father requested him to take charge of his son as his Shishya, Kumar was already as well known as his teacher.

When Kumar left Sulabhavi and went to Bombay to stay with his Guru it was a new world that opened up to the wondering eyes of a boy who had not yet reached his teens. Deodhar belonged in the Gwalior inheritance in the line of Pandit Vishnu Digambar Paluskar but he was also something more than a singer. He was intellectually and scientifically inclined. Visiting Europe he had attended the Beyreuth Festival and had for the first time heard European voices in opera, the whole Trilogy of the Nieblings King, Der Rheingold, Die Valkyrie and the Gotterdammerung. The Indian inheritance, we are aware, keeps a lot of store by the voice but for a musically intelligent Indian in the 1920s and the 1930s, the sound of European opera voices, if heard for the first time, could be an unseating experience. Europeans produce vocal reach not by raising pitch but by

increasing volume. So in the European vocal culture there is a concept called voice production. The Indian voice, on the other hand, when developed along the right lines serves its musical function at its highest when it commands interior dimensions rather than mere volume or weight as items *of* quality in themselves, so that the idea of voice production is meaningless in Indian music. Professor Deodhar had for many years hoped that he would be able to introduce some kind of Western voice-related exercises into Indian music. He persevered in this direction for many years, but the fact that the Indian classical music inheritance does not have a tempered scale and its enunciation is part of language and not of sound, hobbled his efforts.

Kumar's arrival in Bombay turned his inner world upside down. At that time, there was this place which Deodhar used as a point of assembly, of performance, and of sharing for the whole of the Hindustani classical music world. In a few years at The School of Indian Music, hard by the Kennedy bridge, just a call away from the beach at Chowpatty, Kumar had heard almost all the voices and all the Gayakis of most of the Gharanas that were extant anywhere in India at that time. One day it would be the immortal Bade Gulam Ali Khan singing in its meagre auditorium, with the young Lata Mangeshkar, dressed in the skirt and blouse of the West Coast, listening, lost and rapt to a Bhimpalasi of the great Khan Saheb. There could be the wistful voice of Abdul Karim Khan singing Jhinjhoti one day; on another day you could hear the shining upper Shadja of the young Roshanara Begum or Hirabai Barodekar's speeding Taans, or it could be Kesar Bai in a stunning Durga. In a few years time Kumar had heard them all and Deodhar Master Saheb was a fine and careful teacher, filling up those specific gaps in Kumar's fierce and assertive assurance of feeling about Ragas which he knew only by ear and not by learning.

In the shortest period of time in the history of learning Hindustani classical music, in perhaps little less than a year's time, the scales of the Kagas fell into place in the form of Aroha and Avaroha and not merely as a magical feeling in the ear, and the Vadi and the Samavadi took their place as an organic part of the living substance of the Raga. The Talas too began to fall into place, the sixteen beat Tintala, the gait of the Tilwada in contrast to the Vilambit Tintala. In Kurnar's mind all these items of newly acquired knowledge began to separate from the lyric phrasing of a Bandish on the basis of which Kumar used to sing without thinking of Tala as separate from Laya. Long before Kumar knew the difference between the Khali and the fifth beat of a Tintala, he was able to achieve a knife-edge accuracy in his Tala without the slightest clue of where he was in the cycle of Matras. When asked how he managed to do this each time without once missing the crucial metric division of the lyric and the Tala, he would reply that he could hear the beckoning Sam in his inner ear and merely obeyed the call. He could never say how he achieved this feat in any comprehensible terms. In a matter of months Kumar had mastered the inner theoretical criteria of music, the inherited structure of the Ragas and the Thaats, and of how Bandishes were crafted to give them life.

He had heard many singers by then and there were these magical records which stimulated his ability in his very special circumstances to reproduce as many Gayakis and techniques that suited his fancy. He created such an unforgettable impact, particularly on account of his surprising youth and the curious ringing voice with which he sang that he seemed to need very little effort to reach those areas in the social spaces of the art which take most singers a life time to reach. The fact that he was only a child and had many

miles to go before he would reach the safe haven of certitude and serenity were all far from his mind. There was the daily grind of practice, the scale work, thousands of times up and down the Saptak in every kind of pattern and design till his voice seemed almost disembodied. There was also the need to develop a closeness and intimacy with the many Bandishes that he was taught and the many that he would pick up with his preternaturally acute, aural sensibility. All these took a little more time. In a very few years' time, Kumar got a clear grasp of what music was all about Music seemed to him principally to consist of a series of manoeuvres through the notes of the scale of a Raga. A performance was required to be in a series of steps beginning with the Alap and then going on to the Bandish with its two movements, the Sthayi and Antara. This was to be followed with the elaboration through the syllables of the Bandish which was called Bol Alap and which, through a steady speeding up of the tempo, made space for Taans and Boltaans until the singer would have in a sense shot his bolt both technically, psychologically and emotionally. He would then proceed to conclude his recital with a metrical manoeuvre called a Tihai. This was the standard format of a recital. The differences between one singer and another lay principally in the quality of technique, the speed of Taans, the play of lyrics, the quality of voice, its reach, its volume and flexibility. So long as a singer never went off-key and produced a flawed note, he was as good as arrived.

Kumar had reached this station with the utmost case, without fuss or effort, almost, it seemed, miraculously. The problem with Kumar was that it seemed to him in the balance a bit too easy, and as a result a little facile. He was not too excited at the thought of a lifetime spent in the repetition of these techniques and patterns in the art of what was called Hindustani classical music. He was fully aware that Ragas were never static that they grew and were reborn every time any one sang them, and that this power of regeneration that lay hidden in the scales of the Ragas was the mysterious fire of their inner life. He also knew that the Raga rewarded its meanest devotee by giving him a means whereby he may achieve that feeling of creative intensity and magnified life that was the quick of Raga Vidya. This feeling took some years to grow and become a clearly felt element in Kumar's inner life for there was sufficient distraction in it from the life around him to keep his mind on the minutiae of performance, on technical complexities, on the acquisition of new Bandishes, and the creeping sensation that he was being recognised and marked down by his listeners whose expectations began to intrude into the quiet of his inner life. His admirers themselves, God knew, had a hard enough time with him, not knowing how to take him, nor the manner in which they should try to understand him. On the face of it he was just a growing child like any of those thousands who were growing up just like him everywhere else in the complex and largely mysterious world around him. It was that coltish age in which he was neither man nor boy- Yet his art seemed to put him in the same level as some of his teachers, at which level he was by no means a child and was looked upon with sheepish admiration. He could never make sense of this schizophrenic ambiguity of attitude towards him. Kumar was extremely sensitive to this predicament in his life, particularly because he had had nothing to do with its making. In fact, he began, as the years passed, intensely to dislike his life and all that it meant. A struggle to come to terms with his own inner state of bewilderment with respect to an art that seemed to have been literally thrust down his throat went on for nearly ten years. The problem lay in the fact that his musical likes and dislikes and his temperament had been fully made long before he learned the secrets of

the art. For one, Kumar had an early feeling for the difference between the structural qualities of the lyrics of Bandishes; for example, the psychological impact of a Bandish with a short, terse Mukhda and one which covered a wider span. What any right-off-the-street student of music would take years to assimilate, Kumar would come to fully knowing. Thus, it was that in a few years there was little that Deodhar Master Saheb could teach him. This was the hardest and perhaps the most stressful time in Kumar Gandharva's life when he seemed to have been cut adrift on an open ocean without a compass or a horizon toward which he could metaphorically steer.

5. *Panchama*

In actual fact, Kumar Gandharva did not need a Guru in the strict sense in which the Guru Shishya Parampara was originally envisaged. Kumar could easily have gone it alone as, in fact, in a certain sense he did. On the face of it, however, it must be admitted that B. R. Deodhar was his Guru in most senses of the word. It was under Deodhar's care that Kumar grew into manhood, and for the likes of a child with Kumar's gifts, and burdened with the kind of inner restlessness and precocity which Kumar possessed, that care and subtle guidance which Kumar received from him was perhaps the ideal ambience he could ever have ordinarily got from the world of Hindustani classical music.

By the time Kumar entered his late teens he was almost sure what he did not want of Hindustani classical music. For example, he did not want to become a mere manipulator or an acrobat of the scales. He knew that with the kind of strange and unaccountable head start he had received by the odd circumstance of his beginning, it would perhaps be the easiest thing for him to do. He had already developed a sufficient feel for the Ragas. The techniques of handling their progressions, for example, and the significant gait of many of the Bandishes that he was taught from the various Gayakis he had learnt to mimic. Then, too, with Deodhar's instruction he had learned to sing for himself- By working on the scales relentlessly for sometime he had been able very quickly to speed up his Taans, and since he already had a feel for the inexorable structure of Talas, singing seemed to *be* an easy thing for him to do, almost a lark.

In future years, it seemed to him, that he would be doing all this much more efficiently, with greater *elan* and confidence. His Taans, for example, could only become faster and more nimble in their subtle geometries. While he knew that his Taans could be made to run swifter and turn more complex, would it not mostly sound merely clever while remaining essentially inert? Where was their life to come from? Kumar knew the reason why the Gamak Taans enjoyed so much prestige in musical circles. This was largely because it was difficult to sing them dead. They had to be crafted, each Swara one after another, at double, triple, or a higher measure. On the other hand, Kumar knew that Gamak Taans by themselves emphasised virtuosity more than meaning and added very limited emotional colour to a musical phrase; nor did they always give the phrase a narrative tug.

In this milieu he could see his future only as a creature of the scales, born and raised in it, and not one arising from the curious stirring of an inner presence within the Swara, which was the essence of Raga and gave it the autonomy of life. Music born of scales seemed a bit too easy, a matter of the number of hours he would put into practice. He would soon acquire more Bandishes and perhaps, at some future date, make some of his

own. He would be respected more and more, not as he now was as a strange phenomenon, but because he would have begun to say something which everyone could identify through one of the prevailing styles of a Gharana.

Kumar had begun to realise that the musical culture that he found around him would not give him much scope for doing what he wanted to do for himself so long as music remained foundered on the scales of the Ragas. Learning music seemed to have begun and ended there. Kumar was not loathe to admit that scales were a vital component of all Ragas, as were their Vadis and Samvadis and their subtly located Pakads. But he was sure in his heart that scales did not make Ragas. That there was something else needed to make a Raga besides the scales from which it had been born, of this he was sure.

At that time Kumar did not have the foggiest idea of what this something else was. He was sorely troubled by the seeming mechanicalness of the learning process and the prospect of a future in the art which only offered him more of the same thing. There would perhaps be much more sophistication and greater authority as time wore on, which latter presumably only a Gharana would provide rather than the artist's level of being. The long-winded introductions that he would often hear of contemporary musicians before they sat down to perform, of their origins and the stories of their Gurus who taught them, all of that it seemed to Kumar were held to be more important in the acceptance of the artist than the essence of his performance. The teacher seemed always to have remained the main proof of the art. Many of these introductions Kumar did not even believe. Their historical details seemed to have been improvised, like the Ragas themselves, on the spur of the moment. Kumar knew instinctively that true to the Indian cultural inheritance musicians did not like too much history, whether their own or indeed of the art itself. There would be very little space left to them for creative manoeuvre if history, such as there was, began to be literally understood in the realm of fact rather than of truth.

This was among the many subtle reasons why when the recording industry laid siege to the Ragas, musicians in a sudden knee-jerk reaction ignored it and felt threatened. They did not like to be called to account. So long as each performance died as soon as it was born, anything could be surmised about it. But when it became possible to recall it literally from a turning disc it became history and therefore accountable. Since the art got disengaged from the moment, it was true that it became part of reminiscence. The emotional texture of the instant was also lost and the song you heard from the record became no longer the song that was sung but a first-rate facsimile. Kumar recognised that this invention had certainly produced a genuine sea-change in the nature of the Ragas and the way they were perceived up until then. What it actually did was something social.

It liberated the music, for example, from the stranglehold of ownership of Bandishes, of vocal techniques, and the distinct stylistic inheritances which made the Gharanas unique quarantines of each inheritance. The Guru-Shishya Parampara of music also enjoined that a Shishya should not only be trained by the same tradition but also avoid listening to the sound of other Gharanas for fear that such listening might compromise the Shishya's ears. The Ganda Bandh ceremony was a kind of marriage, a monogamous single bond, a mystic, incalculable welding of connection that transcended mere material obligations and went beyond into the timeless spaces of other births.

Kumar combated this fear of the recording industry. He used to say that a record is just like a photograph of a song as at that moment. What was wrong with a photograph; nobody would mistake a photograph of a man for the man himself? Kumar knew within himself though that he was not too likely to get a "completion certificate" from a Gharana even if he formally studied under one. There is little doubt that if he desperately wanted this he could have fudged it superbly by merely surrendering the strange aural memory with which he was born in the service of any one Gharana. That single act would have given him instant and unimpeded entry into the mysterious, ancient kingdom of the Gurus of the inheritance.

He could have become the leading edge, in all likelihood of the Gwalior Gharana, become greater than many who had gone before him for he could as easily have mimicked the Gwalior Gayaki, as indeed any other, with the same conviction and assurance with which he imitated Kirana or Agra or Jaipur Atrauli, or the subtle nuances of the Bhendi Bazar. And then who was to know the difference between him and all the others that went before him? It seemed a bit too easy on the face of it. If the Ragas were indeed scales and nothing more, and mastering the art was nothing more than doing everything in it a little bit better than all the others, then indeed the surrender to a Gharana would be the only way in the art, and the Gharana would be the only test of the artist.

In those years Kumar was never sure that this was in fact the true secret of the art. So he held back from that final surrender to the Gharana. He sang privately to himself, beginning before any one else was up in the Deodhar household, before dawn broke, lightening the sky over the sea whose waves idled against the bit of beach called Chowpatty, singing, trying out various musical stratagems, sometimes vocal, sometimes merely mental, to get at the root of this feeling of distance and reserve within him. He often worried over the fact that most Gharanas had only one single archetype who represented the Gharana in all its manifold significance and after whom, mostly, the Gharana was named and identified. All those who came after the archetype seemed weak and spavined versions of the great soul who first inspired the Gharana into existence. This was an unbearable predicament in Kumar's mind in which to find himself. He was, at that point, being offered a boundless ocean of opportunities for growth and development without the slightest reserve by a Guru and a Gharana that Kumar both loved and admired. Yet, there he was, marooned on this bleak island of self-doubt, unable to accept any of the things that he could merely ask for and get for the asking. Principally his problem was the feeling, and one that would never leave him no matter how hard he tried to rationalise the prevailing musical culture, that the art as understood and transmitted to a student was mostly judged in the public domain through a measure of pedigree rather than of quality, unless the quality was particularly assertive. The performance had this stage of Alap, after which came the Bandish through a Vilarnbit of sometimes painful slowness, then came the Madhya Laya or a Jalad, a Tarana, and so on. This was the shape and the accepted organic structure of a performance. Everyone followed this pattern. That was the only structure there was. Then there was the voice. A musically adequate voice was called Surela, There were no values attached to this word Surela. Like the Sanskrit language it was just a word to which you were allowed to attach any meaning that you were driven to take through the nature of your temperament and inclinations. The way, for example, his Guru Deodhar, through his exposure to Western Music, would differentiate between a Head Voice and a Chest Voice, the quality of nasal

resonance, contrasted against nasality, were unknown in the Indian milieu. On the other hand, the word Surela only meant a voice that had the presence of Sur in it. The word Sur itself was felt and understood variously by each individual. There was no consensus on its true characteristics. Then, Kumar would argue, if a person was not Besura, could such a person's voice be considered Surela.

In the musical world of his youth these questions were conundrums. Fortunately for himself Kumar did not ask these questions loudly, nor too insistently. In fact, he was never known to ask too many direct questions. He merely puzzled over these issues inwardly, and because of these strong internal predilections, merely suffered quietly.

These questions however constantly troubled him, torturing him with a sense of hopelessness at his inability to accept the prevailing approach to the art of the Raga. He did not have the faintest due where he might turn in order to get answers to these puzzling aspects of Raga and their scales. He was only becoming more and more sure that he would never be able to follow the traditional precepts of the inheritance which had by then become part of the teaching process connected with becoming a singer. The problem was what was he to do, where was he to turn to find a path that he could follow and find credible answers to the vexations with which he seemed to have been beset.

Increasingly, Kumar's life was becoming the dark and bitter night of the soul and that evening, when returning from an aimless walk near the Opera House, near a shop called The Powell Company, Kumar could not bear it any longer. Suddenly and quite unaccountably Kumar burst into tears, sobbing bitterly, his shoulders shaking piteously with the hopelessness of his predicament.

Such an outburst was unusual for the boy for in actual fact Kumar was stoic by temperament. He was on most occasions tearless in the way he assessed the world around him and he abhorred any kind of self-pity or sentimentality. This was an attitude that came in handy in the years of sickness and uncertainty that were later to become an epic point of his path through life. But when the sobbing and the tears had ended that evening in Bombay he felt curiously light-hearted, a surge of hope began to wake in him. He could not put his finger on this feeling of sudden effulgence, and of sense of meaning entering his mind where a moment ago there was not a shred of hope. He remembered that it was this same feeling that had possessed him on. that day when he had been sitting on the floor in front of the great Anjani Bai Malpekar and had felt for the first time in his life the shattering impact of a human voice that shone with the searing presence of divinity, the like of which he had never dared even to dream in his wildest fancies. He had, on that day, suddenly known that what he was hearing was the true substance of Swara and the gleaming essence of all Ragas. Deodhar Master Saheb had already in a certain sense bequeathed his gifted student to the care and guidance of Anjani Bai, merely so that the restless spirit of the boy could be somehow appeased.

* * *

Anjani Bai was an extraordinary woman. Kumar was smitten by the power of her inner assurance and stillness. It was with Anjani Bai, and within her neighbourhood, that Kumar suddenly understood the power of Swara from which Ragas are born. Words like Swara and Swara Sadhana are in most cases used idly in Hindustani music, like so many

other esoteric aspects of our inheritance which are bandied about irresponsibly in the public domain. In actual fact very few people, if ever, practise this Sadhana about which so much eulogy and description exist in the folklore of the art- Anjani Bai Malpekar was a singer who had fought her way into this esoteric region of the art and had begun to inhabit the kingdom of Swara with an assurance which very few musicians ever truly know, or even understand. Most musicians get by with a perfectly Surela voice and that is good enough for all that anyone may ever wish to know of the true secret of Raga.

Sadhana is a word that has always lain hidden in the veiled world of the Yoga of Nada. The triggering word for this concept was Brahman about which people had all kinds of notions but no personal experience. In music, from the beginning of time the best bet had always been found to be Raga Vidya and there was always so much to be done in that realm that very few people ever critically examined the ground on which the whole edifice was built, which is the Swara. Almost instantly in a major internal decision, Kumar decided to lay siege to this kingdom of the Swara. He watched Anjani Bai like a hawk, breathed her presence within him night and day, watched her face for every hint and implication that passed over it, the way her eyes seemed lost and beyond reach when she paused on an upper Shadja, even the veins on the side of her neck while she pressed hard on a note, and the way she economised every particle of her breath. Above all he listened constantly to that region just beneath her voice, to those nearly inaudible intimations lurking within it that throbbed with life which is the essence of Swara, surfacing sometimes in a Gandhara that sizzled in a Yaman, or that excruciating pause in an upper Nishada that waited for a reprieve in a resolving Shadja.

According to Padmavati Shaligram, Anjani Bai, on her part, watched Kumar, watching that strange, feral concentration which she had never seen in the face of anyone so young, and had a sudden feeling, one day, that the boy knew. There was no mistaking it. He had found out and there was now nothing left to do but to tell him all. If there was anything in all this, she might as well admit that this was the only child she had ever known who could be entrusted to receive the secret of Swara.

Rahul Barpute was once narrating this event in Kumar's life in the context of pointing out how difficult life turns out for those who are looking for truths rather than information. Anjani Bai was not a professional musician. She had never needed to go professional and earn a living by singing and as a result she had that subtle disdain for those who made the art a commercial enterprise, teaching it through tuitions and other stratagems. At the time Kumar was brought to her by Deodhar Master Saheb she was already in her sixties and had not sung in public places in years, except for her own pleasure. That she could ever have deigned to accept Kumar, in a certain sense as her Shishya, was itself a surprise for Deodhar. She was not what is normally called the teaching kind.

This decision to teach Kumar, if it can be called teaching in the strict sense, could have been, according to many at that time, because he did not belong among the usual run of students that hovered around the music schools in Bombay. She saw also that he was a burdened child, nonplussed and at sea with his own life, struggling to figure out his own predicament. He was a prodigy, she had been told, and his reputation had travelled way ahead of him everywhere. And, at least in the beginning, Anjani Bai could have been merely curious to know what this prodigy business was all about. Thus, he was asked to

sing for her. Barpute thinks it was Shankara that Kumar had sung that night. Tie had followed it up with *Sltyama Sundara Madana Mohana,* the Bhairavi version of it in which Kumar illustrated a kind of motion and a gait that fitted the lyrics like a glove. The Tilang version would have been easier perhaps in the sense of building on the lyrical base, but he had preferred the Bhiaravi. For some one as canny, wise and astute as Anjani Bai, the smouldering fire in the boy would have been as plain as paint. It was not a performance that she heard from Kumar that night. There was not a Taan in it, not one technical flourish, nor a whiff in it of any aspect of the art that merely showed rather than revealed, but there was in it the unmistakable presence of a searching, troubled spirit. Anjani Bai could easily see that Kumar was still imitating, and Barpute thinks that it was the Kirana style that came to Kumar's mind, something a bit like Abdul Karim Khan Saheb. Anjani Bai at once recognised Kumar's rapt enchantment with the lyrical substance of the Bandishes he sang, and heard his Akar, which was distinct and different from any that Hindustani classical music had known up until then.

The vocal intonation of Hindustani classical music emerges from Muslim and Sufi sources. The languages of the North, whether Hindi, Urdu, Bengali, Oriya — even Marathi — had an imperceptible Persian and Arabic resonance which lies hidden in the breath of the languages as spoken. This had occurred through the historical accident of the long Muslim rule, the Baithak, the Durbar and the Tehzeeb; the linguistic and cultural impact that had spread over the centuries across all the many distinct regions of the North. Kumar's intonation was Southern. He belonged in the Kannada country and Kannada, as indeed all the other languages of Peninsular India such as Tamil, Malayalam or Telugu, possess the original sub-continental intonation, free of the Arabic and Persian cultural and linguistic impact.

There was also the voice. The good voice in the Indian definition was in the region of the Alto-Contralto register. So that when a boy's voice broke and produced a tenor — baritone, learning to sing was suspended and in musical families, boys with male registers took to instruments. It was a few Muslim households that continued to teach singing even after a boy had broken his voice into tenor and baritone and it were these households that produced the first baritones of Hindustani classical music. When the immortal Faiyaz Khan of the Agra Gharana initially appeared in public, listeners did not know what to make of that blast of sound that grated to their unfamiliar ears and with which later they fell in love. This quality was perceived as something odd when Kumar first began to sing. As long as Kumar was imitating, he also imitated the Aakar of the Gayaki so it was not clearly noticeable. But, later, when it came to himself and he eventually began to sing on his own, he used the language as he knew it personally to be. Besides, it must be remembered that the well-known Gharanas of Hindustani classical music had all originated in Muslim households whether the oldest of Haddu and Hassu Khan of the Gwalior Gharana, or any other. Kumar's Aakar did not have just one vowel in it. It had all the vowels in it, the whole gamut of a, e, i, o and u, in a single breath. His Gamakas had a Southern implication in them; in the way he divided syllables, or stressed the accent on any one syllable of a word, emphasizing its meaning in a novel way. This Southern inflection in Kumar's language gave a new quality to the meaning of Hindi and Marathi words which traditionally took a safe path and were more often musically interpreted rather than culturally. Kumar's Southern intonation brought the music linguistically into a new cultural environment. His linguistic inheritance was also free

from the lineage of the Khan Sahebs of Hindustani classical music. There was also the question of voice. Kumar also broke his voice like any other boy. But it did not change into the deep registers of the standard adolescent breaking of voice. It got a husk in the place of the rumble and the grain. His lower access remained as before not more than two or three notes below his tonic. Kumar did not give any thought to access whether above or below. He set to work in a direction perpendicular to the linear direction of the scales of music. This was an altogether new direction in the path of musical scales.

In a sudden, inductive leap of understanding Anjani Bai saw Kumar clearly almost in a kind of silhouette, transfixed against the background of all the implications with which this chit of a boy had unknowingly entered the world of classical music. The decision to accept Kumar as her Shishya was sudden, unplanned and instantaneous. In a sense, Kumar's fate was sealed.

Over the next few years the whole inner meaning of the Swara and its place in Raga were very slowly and imperceptibly revealed to Kumar. In its essence what Anjani Bai made Kumar realise without actually telling him in so many words was that every Swara was, in principle, a Shadja. A Shadja, as its name implies, had six positions encapsulated within it. If he did not know every Swara of his scale as though it were a Shadja with six regions within it, towards each of which he was able to cultivate a vocal access, he would not know Swara; and if he did not know Swara he would not know Raga. He would only know scales. He may know a thousand scales that have the names of Ragas, and thousands of Bandishes, yet he would never know the art until he knew every Swara as a Shadja.

The problem in learning music was that it was always the scales that were taught as Ragas and a Swara existed only as part of a scale and not by the virtue of itself; and the Bandishes that were built on those scales were merely words wrapped round the notes of the Raga, like a musical Saree. It was the practice of each Swara as a Shadja that liberated the student from the scales and gave him the essence of the Swara. The scales then fell into place. It would seem from all accounts that Kumar went at this exercise suggested by Anjani Bai like a tiger after its kill.

Krishnan Nambiar, who was a native of Shoranur, Kerala, looked after and managed the Kumar household in all those years that Kumar lay in bed debarred from singing, Kumar was asleep when I arrived unannounced at his house one September afternoon in the 1950s on my way to Hyderabad. Until Kumar woke up I sat talking to Krishnan Nambiar. He was delighted to be able to speak a little bit in Malayalam, which he said he hardly ever did after he joined the Kauns household in Karachi. Nambiar was also called Kanna, which is an abbreviated name for Krishnan. He was an extremely sensitive and knowing man and always referred to his employer as Daivam. When I asked Nambiar whether Kumar sang at all during his illness, Nambiar replied that he did not think so, but there was this one thing. He seemed constantly to be humming something to himself, so softly that you did not hear anything unless you went close to him. These were not songs, he was keen to point out, but a kind of sound which he did not understand. He was hardly audible away from the bed on which he lay but Nambiar was able to hear him because he would go into his room to attend to his needs several times a day. Apparently this humming did not do him any harm. By the time Bhanumati returned from school that day Kumar had already woken up and we sat and talked till late in the evening. This house lay

at the edge of the Bombay-Agra Road and the town of Dewas lay spread on one side of it and at night its lights glimmered in the darkness, like a Milky Way, beneath us.

Many years later in the latter half of the 1960s in a room in the Ashoka Hotel in Delhi, Kumar would reminisce on the magic of Anjani Bai Malpekar. Anjani Bai had apparently suggested to Kumar to imagine every Swara of the scale as about an inch broad and if a voice while singing a note would just touch one or the other side of the breadth of tins imagined inch, that voice would be considered to sound perfectly Surela. But if it could be vividly imagined that there was an inch of space between the two edges of the single Swara, it is in this space that the elusive power of the Swara resides. Also, if by sheer persistence a student would find six resting-places for his voice within the space of a single note, that singer need never to sing again. It would be the first internal experience of the closest approximation of the Nada Brahman. It mattered nothing whether others listening to him sing heard it or not, as long as he himself had his mind set on it and would watch for minor changes of feeling and awareness of the quality and texture of the Swara on which he was working.

Anjani Bai had apparently gone on to point out that this idea had nothing to do with the theory of Shrutis of Hindustani classical music. Shrutis lay outside the two edges of the single Swara, above or below, behind or before this imagined breadth of the single note. Microtones and other measures had nothing to do with this inner stirring. To be able to conceptualise such a region within each note needs an extraordinary level of intellectual and musical intelligence. The late Walter Kauffman of the University of Indiana at Bloomington who had made careful notes of this meeting recalled at a seminar of European voice teachers at the Santa Cecilia Academy in Rome many years later that he had never imagined in all his life an approach to the scales of such forbidding profundity.

I here is little doubt that in the years following this devastating discovery Kumar persisted in his search for the limitless landscape hidden within a single Swara. And in all probability the humming sound that Krishnan Nambiar reports to have heard in the vicinity of Kumar’s bed was this soundless inner work which is able to bore a passage through the unfelt inner barriers of a person and reach the very substance of his life. The widely-chronicled event which reportedly occurred at the home of Krishna Rao Majumdar in Dewas when out of the blue Kumar announced that he knew at last how to sing, came from this ecstatic and at the same time slightly unnerving experience of suddenly finding within his own voice the first indubitable presence of space within each Swara.

That unforgettable night, it would seem, was spent in an orgy of singing that began with Bhimpalasi earlier in the evening and then went on to Yaman and later to the Ragas of the night, ending at the first flush of pink in the East with Vibhas. It was perhaps this strangely enchanted night that he had spent in the Majumdar home that gave Kumar the first true glimpse of the bond between language, Swara and silence. To a group of American language teachers who had assembled in Delhi in the 1960s he had made a startling remark that some one who did not know the nature of silence can neither speak nor sing. Both these abilities, Kumar had declared, were built on the substance of silence and demanded the knowledge that at the very centre of every Swara there is

hidden a vast space of impenetrable silence. In a certain sense, it cannot be denied that Kumar's singing embodied this knowledge.

6. Dhaivat

To say, as many music lovers do, that Kumar brought the Tanpura hack into Hindustani classical music *can* be considered hyperbolic, the kind of exaggeration that helps sometimes in jolting us into restoring certain perspectives that are easily lost. Kumar obviously could not be literally credited for having put back the Tanpura into contemporary Hindustani, classical music. That would be absurd. But it is almost as hard to deny that he certainly had a major hand in regenerating the awareness of the place of this instrument in the art.

What happens to music when those who love it is that they begin to take it for granted and stop watching it carefully for those imperceptible changes of emphasis and feeling that time brings into everything we believe in and do with our lives. This phenomenon can be seen in the place the Tanpura has increasingly come to inhabit in the Carnatic music inheritance in the last fifty years. Before the Srutipetti which came after the pedal harmonium which the Christian Missionaries arc believed to have brought to India from the West, the Tanpura could not but have held a primary position in Carnatic music. Very soon, however, the Srutipetti usurped the unassailable position of the Tanpura. In recent decades, the Tanpura in Carnatic music seems to have become somewhat less than vital in the status which it seems to enjoy. It is not that it is absent. You can even see one in the ensemble on the stage. Its presence in the ensemble, however, has become somewhat like the Sindoor that you sometimes see on an Indian woman's forehead; identifiable, yes, but not vital.

Compare this present circumstance of the Tanpura in Carnatic music with an event that reportedly occurred on the stage in a Bombay suburb several decades ago when Kumar Gandharva abandoned a concert without even starting to sing because try as hard as he would, the Tanpuras would not tune to the quality he wanted on account of the vagrant weather. It seemed to every one in the auditorium that his Tanpuras were sufficiently in tune. For Kumar, obviously, it was not so. The audience dispersed without a murmur. They were sorely disappointed that Kumar had not been able to sing that evening but they also knew why and what that abandonment of the concert meant in the music of Kumar Gandharva. Tuning the Tanpura right, each to his own inner needs, is an esoteric experience in classical music all the well-known classical musicians traditionally tune their Tanpuras with stunning accuracy, and in their music the Tanpura plays a significant role. This is because the Tanpura constitutes the very ground of the art and it is not possible to think of the art without the Tanpura as the principal source of its inspiration.

What Kumar did to the Tanpura was to point out to his listeners the pivotal role this instrument plays in the very pith and grain of the art. He believed that it was not enough to know the importance of the instrument, which everyone knew in any case, but how it was important to point this out in every performance, in the way its sound is brought to life on each occasion. Metaphorically speaking, Kumar took the Tanpura, gently by the hand, away from its normal role as a mere background accompaniment and made it perform a function that enabled it to enhance tension, add piquancy, and offer resolution.

Kumar used the instrument in a certain sense to frame his voice by letting the audience hear its sound by itself; not by the accident of its presence in the ensemble, but as a deliberate technique of presentation. Often he would compare his singing as an attempt he was making to paint on a background canvas of Tanpura, Tabla and Harmonium a particular portrait of the universe of a Raga through Alap and Bandish as felt at the moment of singing. Just as the unpainted portions of the canvas reveal the empty places on it, what is often designated as negative space, the Tanpura and the other accompaniments appear at those moments of silence that intersperse the performance. Even in his long playing records this strategy is evident where for the space of nearly two full revolutions of the disc you merely hear the sound of the Tanpura against a background of complete silence. The impact of this strategy can be imagined in a digitally mastered recording of Kumar's performances. His singing technique which incorporated pauses that gave his Bandishes a narrative drive as a natural circumstance of the lyrical interpretation of the Bandish, also made the Tanpura seem like an active participant in the emotional thrust of the performance.

Many of his listeners believed that the short, heavily-charged spurts of singing and pause that Kumar favoured was the consequence of not having enough breath with which to sing on account of his illness. This was not true. Kumar's breath was sufficient for himself and his musical needs. The seeming pauses in his style of singing was a waiting, in order to make sure that the lyrical and musical idea he was wishing to convey had duly registered in the minds of his listeners; the sudden silence showed the point he was making The issue that needed to be examined was what was Kumar's musical world like at any given occasion, and what were his needs in this world that he had at that time chosen to create. The Gayaki that he evolved had no place for the remotest hint of vocal vainglory. Which was one of the reasons why Kumar's pacing of the Vilambit was closer to Madhya Laya rather than what was at that time considered the standard pacing of the Vilambit. Kumar considered the prevalent pacing of Vilambit somewhat irrelevant for the musical intentions that he had with respect to the Khyal he was singing. He believed that too slow a pacing of the Vilambit proved nothing with respect to the Raga that he wanted to sing, nor the Bandish, nor indeed with respect to the skill and musical sensibility of the singer by singing at the dragging pace in which Vilambit Khyals were customarily sung. One of the reasons for this somewhat unusual approach that Kumar brought to Vilambit Khyals was because Kumar did not think of the structure of a Bandish to be a mere lyrical frame on which to hang the Raga. He believed that even the seemingly most ordinary words of some or any of all the popular Khyals possessed great resources of poetic resonance and sometimes encapsulated in them subtle qualities of innuendo and understatement that lay concealed within the Swaras in which the words of the Bandish have been *wrapped.* Kumar believed that it was important for *a* singer to reveal this aspect of a Bandish where it exists, instead of concentrating exclusively in extolling the singer's own command and accomplishment in the art.

In fact, Kumar had immense reverence for the traditional Bandishes of Hindustani classical music and whenever he sang them he would add, by the texture of his voice and through novel emphases on the syllables of the lyrics, sudden changes in the familiar gait and feeling of the traditional beloved Khyals. This suddenly produced startling new qualities of beauty and allure that were not noticed in the Khyal before Kumar sang them. In fact, Kumar never used the words of a Khyal as mere hooks to hang the notation of the

Bandish. He believed that the lyrics of the Vilambit Khyal had their own place and life as poetic utterance and were as vital to the thrust of the Khyal as the words of well-known Thumris. This is one of the reasons why he used the words of the Khyal he was planning to sing in his introductory Alap of the Raga, making them function like a kind of musical sextant to find his coordinates across the ocean of the Raga. Metaphorically he could be considered as setting a course true north from a reading from the sun's angle on the Raga's horizon. At that instant the mood and the feeling of the performance was established.

The exhibition of vocal prowess independent of the musical ideas he was exploring in any given performance, or displaying vocal range for its own sake apart from the musical exigencies of the Khyal he was singing, were all abhorrent to Kumar's aesthetic sensibilities. He did not consider, for example, sticking to a top Shadja for two full rounds of an Avarta in order to exhibit lung power as relevant to any awareness of the music by which he lived.

Kumar's inflection of the syllables of words sometimes reminded his listeners of the flavour of the Southern Hari Katha Kalakshepams, and of the linguistic characteristics of Kannada or Telugu, or those of Kathakali and Ottam Thullal of Kerala. This became more apparent when he sang Marathi Abhangas or the songs of the Natya Sangeet when words like Yadukula, Sishupala, Rukmani or Subhadra and other Pauranic references took on the shimmering halo of the pronunciation of Southern languages. This quality in Kumar could have made the Marathi lyrics sound, in his singing, slightly strange and unfamiliar.

Ganesh Phanse once mentioned how in Kumar's childhood and his own in their native Sulabhavi travelling Hari Katha Kalakshepam performers would often arrive to play. These events lasted all night long. Kumar would also sit up throughout the night with the rest of the family till dawn lightened the Eastern sky above the thick mango and jackfruit groves of the village. There was stillness in Sulabhavi's surrounding countryside, before the village was electrified. Phanse would recall how the gas lamps would throw long, eerie shadows all around the make-shift stage beneath the Banyan tree and the voices of the singers would penetrate the furthest frontiers of the mind. There was not a speck of music anywhere in his nature, Phanse would lament, yet that music in his distant Karnataka village held his mind as nothing else ever did.

In the context of the folk of the Malwa region of Madhya Pradesh towards which Kumar was to be drawn later in his life, these early experiences of his own linguistic inheritance must have been a singular asset. He did not have to learn the inner dynamics of the sound and intonation of the folk music of Malwa. He was only returning to his own linguistic roots, merely coming home.

It is difficult to dispute that the world around is unique to each of us, largely a processed product, processed by our minds and through our senses. The culture into which we are born processes us even more than anything in the physical world. The delight, for example, that the very young often exhibit in their pleasure at merely being alive, which is relatively rare among adults is found in the way the world appears to them through their senses, a place of magic, beauty and enchantment. Kumar's world was largely a world of the ear. Describing the beginning of a Kerala monsoon he pointed out how over several weeks the clouds would merely gather and then disperse until one day

when the sky was laden from end to end it would begin at a very slow Vilambit Laya with a drizzle, it would then become a shower that would slowly turn into a downpour, and then a deluge that would go on without a break for weeks. Its sound was unforgettable. There was nothing in music to equal it.

Kumar was not normally a particularly verbal man. He rarely played with ideas in the raw; developing them for the pleasure of watching them grow. He handled things he could touch and hold and his visual response to life was like an iceberg, two-thirds hidden in the blue of the ocean of his psychological being. He was not a divided person, broken into segments, but experienced life with all of him in one single breath. His ears were not merely acute in the sense of the accurate hearing of sound, but he heard the sound's shades and textures, its feeling and its awareness of meaning in its tones and pauses, and most of all he had the ability to remember sound and reproduce it with his vocal chords, exactly as first heard.

We must remember that he came from a singing family. His father was a well-known musician with a wide repertoire and an audience all over Karnataka and Maharshtra. This means that the first significant sounds that Kumar must have heard as a child would have been voices raised in song. Most of all, almost unknowingly, Kumar cultivated the ability to hear at two levels within him, firstly the straight sound in his ears and, secondly, this sound joined to an ability to hear it psychologically within his mind.

This dual impact of sound on him made his singing seem laden with meaning and stirrings of not quite audible implications that hid beneath the notes he sang. Kumar joined this congenital ability to the techniques of Sadhana, hints of which he had picked up from the ambience of Anjani Bai and which he practiced throughout the dark years of his near-fatal illness. This is *a* well understood practice and is often called Mauna Sadhana, which irrigates and fertilises the unconscious mind of the Sadhak. It was this practice that Krishnan Nambiar had heard with a certain curiosity and amusement. When Kumar would constantly advise students of music not to practice scale exercises mechanically for hours but spend time in thought, very few understood what he meant by "thought". Many understood him to mean that he was merely referring to the mechanical nature of the basics of music practice.

* * *

In Kumar's Gayaki there were two distinct landscapes; one of the Raga, and the other of the lyrics of the Bandish, Both these landscapes were vital to his art. He would never use all the techniques of expression and vocal resources that he possessed to exhibit his command of the art but would restrict himself to the needs of the Khyal he was singing At no time or occasion when he sang did the listener get the feeling that he had sung himself out in that Raga and had in any sense shot his bolt for that concert. He stopped singing when he had said what he wanted to say in that Khyal, for that time.

This is one of the reasons why the Kumar Gayaki made the listeners feel that the Khyal he was singing was not just notated in the Raga in which it was composed but seemed to have emerged out of the Raga all in one piece and at once at the time of singing, much in the way an iceberg is part of the ocean from which it has emerged and has not been put there. He adopted the technique of telling you of the words of the lyrics

of the Bandish while he was introducing the Raga — one word here, another there — and let the composition begin to form like ice crystals on a freezing lake, not all at once but in tiny stages, testing out the feeling of the Raga against each single word of the lyric till a stage is reached when the Tabla's entry and the beginning of the singing of the Bandish seemed revelatory, like a prophesy, slowly but surely, coming true.

Kumar used to achieve this quality even in those three-minute shellac records long before the long playing and extended play records became the fashion of the day. There was not time enough in a three-minute shellac disc for any statement about the Raga or the composition except the barest, yet Kumar was able to invest the song with a curious fatedness even in that short time. The reason for this quality was largely because Kumar was singing the Bandish, and not the Raga embodied in the Bandish. Kumar considered the Bandish to be sufficient to itself and when he sang the Khyal in a full performance he was merely showing the ingredients of which the Bandish was made and through which he was able to exalt the power and appeal of the Bandish. In that sizzling composition in Raga Hamir, for example, which begins *Chamcli Phooley Champa,* Kumar brings to life a preternatural spring time; on the one hand triumphant, and on the other laden with the anguish and despair of life's perishing substance. Recall if you can the word *Heera* with which the Antara of this Bandish begins and recall the many times Kumar returns to that word, a Pancham, ringing differently with each coming, but each time slightly more baleful and premonitory than the time before.

This quality is one of the principal characteristics of the Kumar Gandharva Gayaki. Kumar sang out of the Bandish and not out of the Raga He subordinated the Raga to the Bandish, never letting the Raga take priority over the Bandish. This was a unique turnaround in the culture of the Hindustani classical musical heritage. This was the cause of the passion and intensity with which Kumar invested his performance. His Raga Vistara took on the lineaments of the Bandish on account of which the Raga had come to exist. So he showed the possibilities the Raga had in that particular embodiment of the Bandish he had chosen to sing. This was the consequence of a highly developed and delicate literary grasp of the nature of the words of a language and the way they are spoken while being sung.

7. *Nishada*

Kumar Gandharva got married in 1947 to Bhanumati Kauns. Bhanumati had come from pre-partition Sindh and had her family home near Drig Road, not far from Clifton, in the suburbs of Karachi. Ostensibly she came to study music in Deodhar's School of Indian Music in Bombay. She had already managed to qualify herself with a post graduate degree and soon became a student of Kumar Gandharva who by that time had just begun to augment the roster of teachers in Deodhar's School. Kumar was designated to teach all those students who did not have too clear a picture of what the style they wanted most to follow. In a certain sense this was a wise technique to adopt for Kumar himself was still not quite decided on what contour he himself was to give his art, and while there was flexibility with respect to Kumar on the characteristics of Gharana, he was inflexible in his vision of what music should be, boundless, beyond frontiers and paradigms. "There is too much of Kumar Gandharva in Kumar Gandharva," Deodhar used laughingly to say at Kumar's strong predilections that often seemed almost like

physical reflexes towards the art's basic assumptions. And it was not possible to come into Kumar's ambience and not be smitten by the sheer force of his being.

He had an elaborate simplicity within which he lived. Sitting on a mat and leaning a tiny mirror against some furniture and quietly shaving while he laughed and made innocent remarks about life and art, he used the easiest phrase to sidetrack a too close examination of any issue that might have been uppermost in our minds by replying to it with a characteristically domestic answer, simple, unaffected either by scholarship or academic implications. Then there was his Supari slicer with which he would become absorbed. He was a handyman in every sense of the term, could lay pipes or wire a house for electricity. It was a way with him, a fine grasp of the physical shapes and the tangled nature of objects in the world. Bhanumati once said to Rahul Barpute that it is not that Kumar knew the principles of electricity so much but that he knew how things worked and the secret of their nature. But at that time in Deodhar's school, teaching odd classes and himself casting about for a meaning in the art, he was still being assembled as a musician, full of uncertainties and double binds.

Bhanumati, on the other hand, was rational and practical, completely unassailed by doubts and predilections. She had a fine voice, sensitively turned, and Kumar did not find it difficult to make an impact upon her musical gifts. One of the remarks that had in a certain way rankled in Kumar's mind after a concert in which Bhanumati and Kumar had both sung one after the other was when the great thespian Bal Gandharva had humorously remarked that he had enjoyed Bhanumati's singing but had failed to make out what Kumar was trying to do. The great Bal Gandharva might have been puzzled by Kumar's approach to music at that time, but Bhanumati had been able to understand Kumar completely right down to his very being. She quickly hitched her existence to his, like a chariot to the sun, and opened a window into his magnified life.

On the night of 15 August 1947 when India became independent of British rule, in the midst of the country-wide celebrations Kumar was singing Raga Chandrakaus from the All India Radio Station in Bombay. This was perhaps the last time that listeners of All India Radio heard Kumar singing before he was medically silenced for six years. *Yeri Piya* Kumar sang which was the Mukhda of his Khyal in which he made the Shuddha Nishad of the Raga squirm with the whip of anguish flicking in his chest. There was later a brief visit to Calcutta and that was it. He was silenced, finally, irrevocably, for six years.

Dewas was Kumar Gandharva's Karma Kshetra. From a small flat in the Cadell Road area of Bombay city where Bhanumati and Kumar had begun their married life, the couple migrated to Dewas seeking its dry, clean air and open spaces, and the curious psychological vibrations of those towns of Madhya Pradesh with which Kumar had made an early bond in his childhood.

The chemistry of Dewas on Kumar Gandharva was a strange and mysterious phenomenon. Dewas, long before Kumar's arrival, was already a part of the universe of Hindustani classical music. The great Rajjab Ali Khan had made his home there. Its landscape and its sounds cape were both subtle and compelling. Kumar used to say, when asked why he had made Dewas his home, that every place has its own sound, a kind of background vibration that, like a cosmic Tanpura, revives the mind and irrigates it. From his childhood he had sneakingly admired the vast spaces of Dewas, the brooding stillness

of its nights and more than ever its temples built on sheer rock, never realising that he would one day go there with the premonition of death and then would reclaim his life for himself and for the music that he wished very much to augment before he was returned to his Maker. This purpose filled his every waking moment

Dewas is rocky, slightly hilly, with sudden prominences that raise their heads above the surrounding plains and moorlands. Kumar loved it here and as soon as he arrived in Dewas he had a clear premonition that he would not die, no matter what happened. And when Streptomycin first came into the market and its ampoules which Kumar called Bulbs, at Rs. 30/- a day entered his domestic economy for a whole year, he took it as a kind of rent he was paying to Ms Maker for giving him time on earth to live and prove his life. And he once told the two of us, Rahul Barpute and I while 1 was driving us all back home from the Vice-Chancellor's residence in Delhi, the meaning of what he considered to be life. A sudden power breakdown had brought in a shaft of moonlight through the large French windows of the Vice-Chancellor's house and the room was flooded with an eerie luminescence and the air was full of the smell of the flowers of Spring. Kumar had begun at once to sing the Raga Shree Kalyan, that strangely moving Bandish that begins *Dekko Re Uta* hovering on that baleful Komal Rishabha, telling us where the Rishabha of the Raga was actually located. Life and death, he was saying as we drove through the sleeping city, were also part of place and time. There was a place to be born in, which has its time, and a place to die in, which also has its time, and these are all set. Nobody can come by and change them for our convenience. You have merely to catch up with them. Even in the darkest days when every moment seemed to be the last, Kumar did not feel that there was any real threat to his life, nor indeed that that moment was to be the end.

Bhanumati ran the house and also ran the Girl's School in Dewas of which she had been made Head Mistress while Kumar lay in bed and listened with his nearly miraculously retentive ears to the sounds of life flowing past his house, on the roads, and also on the pathways on the other side where from grass cutters and cow and sheep herders and worshippers at the many temples scattered across the countryside went about their business, singing.

Dewas was a singing country whose inhabitants sang at their work and at the festivals, driving cattle or merely walking through. This was probably true in most rural places in India at that time when the noisy, trivial life styles lived in urban India had not yet begun to show. Kumar's understanding of folk primarily came from his delight in the music that flows from a lived life. The folk do not sing in the strict sense. They are telling things to each other and this speech sounds like song. Kumar knew this characteristic of the folk song. There was celebration in it, sometimes heart-break, but they were still just telling each time they sang, and this telling sounded to our ears like music. There was ritual in it; of course, in some cases inherited traditional tones of speech too that have been embalmed through the centuries in the way they were sung. These were not things they were taught. They discovered them in their lives and confirmed them through their experience. Many years later when the All India Radio was playing back Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru's speech on India's tryst with destiny, Kumar remarked that the way Panditji was speaking English there was a musical quality in it, a little up and down, and a waiting at the end of a cadence. It is the folk in us, he pointed out. You do not have to be a singer. There was no need in it for musical sophistication or know-how, nor indeed

the awareness that these were songs that they were singing. It was life; all of it sung out in a single draught. You needed a mind and a temperament for it. If you possess that mind and that temperament, it is in the folk form that you will speak of those vital things of life which cannot be spoken tonelessly in prose. It is this aspect of the quick of life with which Kumar was concerned.

A folk tune does not have Raga, what it has are the seeds of feeling. It is these seeds of feeling which can be incorporated into a Raga after which the folk in it is reborn into another kind of life. Kumar took these seeds and collected a large number of them. Many of these seeds would fit into the Ragas that already exist. For others, new Raga forms had to happen. Lying in bed he discovered this simple truth. He was not an anthropologist in the way he saw folk, and folk for Kumar was not a science nor a branch of knowledge but was life at its fullest. It were his ears that told him the nature of the folk song and how much and in what manner he could assimilate it as feeling and give it the living, throbbing organism of a Raga within which it may live. The driving principle that motivated Kumar was his irrepressible delight at what he heard. He did not think of Ragas at that time. The only way that Kumar could find an access into that delight was to make those feelings into Ragas where he could hunt after those first feelings and find them again. But the idea of Ragas themselves came much later, long after he was able to quench the first shock of surprised joy that these songs gave him and at the way the folk were able to strike straight at the truths of our lives.

The thing to remember is that he did all this firstly through his ears, not through notation and putting together. The bits and pieces of tone and timbre, the way words had to be used to give them the shining integrity of folk through a musical phrase of a Raga came from the imitative faculty and the power of aural recall in Kumar. He stole the heart of a folk air as soon as its tune fell on his ears and slowly began to clothe them with the raiment of Ragas. He would sing the tune of every song that he heard, soundlessly in bed to himself several times over many weeks until he was able to put that feeling into a familiar Raga. A folk song need not follow any musical law. A tune might seemingly begin to the measure of a Raga, and this need not be more than a note or two or a mere phrase that would be just a feeling that reminds us of a Raga, a little tail without any head to speak of, or a head without a tail or legs and feet. Folk are indifferent to form as a principle of musical geometry. The poetic scansion could exist in many folk songs but its principal concern was with feeling alone. Once Kumar found a sustained feeling in any folk song he would trace it to its likely kin among the scales of extant Ragas. It was not difficult thereafter to introduce the closest equivalent feeling into the corresponding scale of the Raga. The feeling could then be sustained through pause and emphasis on the words of the Khyal by the use of several musical graces such as Meend, Murki, Gamak, or Khatka, or by merely holding a note cunningly directed towards the remembered feeling. Examples of a Gandhara in Yaman, or a Dhaivat in a Bageshri or any of the many other Ragas of Kumar’s finding, or even in a prescient pause in the middle of a syllable of a word can be found everywhere in Kumar’s repertoire of Bandishes which has changed the whole feel of Ragas from their remembered emotion to a brand new awareness of freedom and delight. Kumar’s Ragas have never been put together from concepts but were born instantaneously, always single and whole in one gush of feeling and then got held into the classical laws and moulds from which Ragas emerge. It was only when he was sure that a Bandish had come to stay and showed to possess a vitality

and an urge for a life of its own that Kumar wrote it down as notation but continued to keep it loose for quite a while, singing it in public places as often as he felt like it so that the Bandishes became a part *of* the memory of his listeners. This was true also for Bandishes in traditional Ragas in which he had several Khyals of his own fashioning that threw fascinating insights into the nature of the Ragas in which they were first composed. The point about Kumar Gandharva was not that he was trying to do something different merely because he did not want to tread the worn path.

Kumar once said of the Raga Yaman when he was singing the Bandish *Yar Vina,* at a Spic Macay Concert for students of music in Delhi a few years before his passing: Try first showing the Gandhara as in Yaman, and then show it again as a mere Gandhara. You must think of a Swara as though it were a fish. It can go straight ahead along the scale, or swim in the same place at various depths. If you do not go ahead there is plenty of places just where you are or the same note at different levels. He showed the youngsters three vastly differing Shuddha Gandhara of Yaman.

This ability, of course, is the consequence of Swara Sadhana. Think of that Bhoopali in which Kumar sings the Bandish *Abeer Gulal* and wait as the Khyal uncoils for the word “Chandan” and watch how the whole Bandish gets draped in Saffron. You can provide several examples of this phenomenon in Kumar’s art. It is as much a matter of voice whose shadow-thin calibration makes it possible for incredible shading in sound but all if it is not that. Some of that yellow glaze on the feel of the Bandish comes from the way he pronounces the words of the Khyai, joined to the timbre and inner feel of the Swaras. Remember, it is the same Kumar who sings the Khyal *Jabahi Suba Nirapata Nirapata Bhayee* also in Bhoopali. This Bhoopali has no Saffron anywhere in its singing. When Kumar sings this Khyal it gets panelled in narrative where the subject is handled in a linear fashion, the kingly figure of Rama and the bow and the implication of the tragedy of Sita’s future. That Bhoopali sizzles with the foreboding of the unsung tale that was to follow. This Bhoopali is not the Bhoopali of *Abeer Gulal* although the Aroha and the Avaroha are the same. This remarkable ability to colour every Bandish differently came from Kumar’s deep awareness that a Raga is not a scale.

It was on his sickbed that Kumar reached many of those conclusions about life and music which became the identifying characteristic of his impact on the life of the music of his country. It was also on this very bed that his feelings for Bhakti Sangeet came to be formed. The towns of Madhya Pradesh hide every kind of minstrelsy that can be imagined, from seemingly wandering beggars who are advanced Sufi searchers and Auliyas and Bhajan singers who travel the length and the breadth of the State, never staying at one place long enough to be identified. It is not possible to live and be immobilised, as Kumar was, in a cultural environment of this depth without being profoundly affected by the inner turbulence of knowledge and understanding that fills the empty places of Madhya Pradesh. It was here that Kumar discovered the difference between Bhajan singing and Bhakti Sangeet which like a whiplash began to appear in Kumar’s comprehension and understanding of the Nirgun in Kabir Bhajans. It could be said without the slightest exaggeration that it was Kumar Gandharva who brought Bhakti Sangeet back into our music and it was he who made the Bhajan among the concluding items in a concert. Bhakti Sangeet had languished for centuries before his time, finding only an occasional voice straining across the gulf that separates man from God. Bhajan singing is not Bhakti Sangeet, Kumar used to say. It is not the subject of God in the lyrics

of the Bhajan that makes it into Bhakti Sangeet but the man singing it. That is why a Bhakti Sangeet singer needs certain special qualifications before he can begin to make a Bhajan into Bhakti Sangeet.

Good music alone is not enough. That is why Kumar had no need to look heavenward or turn soulful, like Bhajan singers often do, to produce the verisimilitude of Bhakti in their Bhajan. Kumar always looked abstracted when he sang, his eyes shut, and if he opened them at all, he seemed sightless. He continued to look the same when he sang Bhajans that is all. It was the blaze of heat in his voice, the high temperature that suddenly made you uncomfortable with the slap of meaning m his Bhajan. It made no difference whether he sang Kabir, Sur or Meera. They blazed equally in the fire of his tone. There are hundreds of examples but just think of Meera or Sur or even whether Kabir in the singing isolation of the Kumar Swaras. It is the nature of Bhakti which is instantly identified in every single nuance of Kumar's tearing, pitiless Bhajans.

Kumar obviously knew Bhakti differently from the safe social approach to Bhajan singing, which is commonly seen in Bhajan Sandhyas and Satsangs where people gather to remember God. The Sanskrit root *bha* represents error that is part of all natural state of creatures, and the concluding *kti* means remove, separate, put behind, or put a distance between. So for Bhakti you have to know what is what, in what we perceive as life before you can remove the congenital error with which we are born; loving Cod or telling people that you do is not enough. You have to know the nature of what you are extolling in your verses through observing life and living it for greater knowledge of its essence. It is then that your Bhajans will become Bhakti Sangeet. It is merely a manner of paying rent for being given life and is the original obligation of the awakened man. Kumar merely paid his rent scrupulously like any self-respecting tenant on earth.

This approach produced a new kind of Bhajan. In this, too, it can be said that Kumar cut Bhakti Sangeet right down the middle into two neat halves, one the Bhajan that came before him like the way we use B.C. in our measure of the centuries prior to Christ and A.D. for the centuries that came after Him. It is the same with Kumar. Before and after Kumar Gandharva could become a simple way of dating Bhakti Sangeet too.

The West Coast of India has been *the* most susceptible to the influence of Kumar's Bhakti Sangeet since he belonged in the Kannada-Maharashtra linguistic area. In the voices of the young singers, in Veena Sahasrabudhe, in Ashwini Bhide, in Malini Rajurker and several others, the scent of Kumar's vocalism haunts their Bhajans sometimes with an eerie glow. This kind of Bhajan singing does not have to show devotion or faith in the syrupy fashion of our inheritance or any of those false social features that taint Bhajans in the ordinary course of life- This kind of Bhajan can be detached, the Swaras alone holding the message that for instance is contained in Kabir's Dohas and quatrains. This is, of course, why Kumar is remembered in Bhakti Sangeet most through Kabir. There is that feral power in Kabir's warnings that make the poetry leap at you like a tiger springing at its prey. Kumar used this characteristic of Kabir with spellbinding force and power. So that people used to file out of the hall after his concert in a strange way chastened to a quieter and a more sober understanding of life's perishing substance. This is the true inheritance of Kumar's Bhakti Sangeet.

All these strange transformations and discoveries about life and art Kumar made from his bed. In this incredible journey through time and space, a journey in which Kumar did

not stir from his bed, the role of Bhanumati was pivotal; supporting, encouraging and caring, crying silently to herself so that Kumar may not know, attending to the needs of a man in dire physical peril. Krishnan Nambiar, Bhanumati and Streptomycin together brought Kumar's boat safe on to the other side of the river bank, and tied it securely to the stake of his art. Kumar had arrived, safe at last from the threatening moment-to-moment existence of the six years of his medical banishment from music. The doctors gave him permission to sing again.

8. Tara Shadja

Marrying a musician of the ferocity of purpose of a Kumar Gandharva can never be an easy task. A woman who would undertake such a task cannot be naive or easy-going, nor indeed a romantic. The only single force that kept Bhanumati going through those melancholy years was Kumar's own irrepressible love of life and his unswerving conviction that he was born to find something out of himself in music, and that he was not going to be intimidated into yielding to death just because it comes with the fancy name of a sickness.

In the event Bhanumati bore Kumar two sons, first Mukul and, then Yashovardhan. Mukul was trained with the same meticulous care and attention which Kumar gave to everything he undertook and is today among the most disturbingly gifted musicians in Hindustani classical music.

Bhanumati did not live to see Kumar's rise to national and international stature and become the object of the most singular reverence that an Indian musician has ever enjoyed. Ganesh Phanse used to say that if Bhanumati had lived she would have taken in her stride Kumar's meteoric rise to that strange and curiously mythic level of wonder and amazement that Kumar generated wherever he went. She would have merely smiled and said, "I always knew it."

She died suddenly after giving birth to her younger son Yashovardhan, and an occasion that for Kumar should have been a day of celebration turned within a few hours into emptiness and desolation. But Kumar's nature had a sense of exceptional fatedness in it. Most Indians are believed to be fatalistic. This is interpreted as the result of faith in God and is often extolled as the special characteristic of a spiritual people. Kumar's sense of fatedness did not come from a faith in God. His seeming sense of fatedness came from knowing himself, and a deep and abiding sense of pattern and direction in his life. This is not the usual kind of surrender to the will of God. The complaint against the Indian view of life has always been that we do not use the customary dodges of Free Will or ideas like personal effort to cover our tracks. Kumar had an implicit conviction that things in life are directed inexorably towards their appointed end, and that no one can change a hair's breadth of them. But he also knew that this was the outer circumstance for their working out. Personal effort, yes; but, personal effort where? It was no use making any personal effort in the mechanical world outside without first preparing an elaborate ground within. This is the only work that makes any difference to any one within or without. In fact, it was only within that a person had any choices whatever. The choices outside were already made and concluded. We only arrive at them. But the person within had infinite freedom and as long as this person exercised his full freedom within, it made no difference what happened outside. Every action that you took to endorse and augment

your inner work can be undertaken without fear or embarrassment. It was this same thing in his life that took him through his sickness, and its crowning disaster was Bhanumati's passing away.

It is easy to mistake Kumar's view of life as somewhat too objective and detached in that he would not mourn. Grief is private he believed, and no one exists who can make a reasonably accurate estimation of the feelings of another, no matter how close and loving. If the usual grimaces and abhinaya of feeling are omitted it is only its social manifestations that are absent but not the thing itself. Shantaram Kashalkar describing how when he went to Dewas with the thought to console Kumar on the passing of Bhanumati found a seemingly well-adjusted, serene Kumar engaged in playing the host to the many friends and admirers who had called on him to condole his bereavement. Recognising that Kumar did not seem to be too self-indulgent and did not seem to be in need of more than ordinary comforting, Kashalkar proceeded to ask Kumar for permission to leave. Kumar suddenly turned grave and asked him to stay for a while until the rest of his friends had left. Late in the evening Kumar accompanied Shantaram to the railway station and as they walked and approached a roadside culvert Kumar suddenly stopped and sat on it, covered his face with his hands and burst into tears, sobbing inconsolably, bereft like an abandoned child. When he ceased sobbing in a little while he wiped his eyes and signalled to Shantaram that he could now leave and Kumar began to walk back alone homewards. This event shows in the starkest possible manner Kumar's life view. He knew that life's events were set as though in stone, and there was no way to change any of it. What he was sure of was his own destiny for which incontrovertible proofs existed from the first day he drew breath. His path was clear. He was not going to waste any time mourning. Bhanumati had done her life's work fully; every detail had been worked out by her and fulfilled. The fact that he was alive was the proof of her fulfilled life.

He did not need anything more. He was not going to do less. When her time had come she had upped and left. There was nothing more left for her in this plan set out for her to do. Kumar was also going to do the same. Finish his work as he was meant to do, so that Bhanumati's life may not have gone in vain. Quickly he decided to put his life in order, put together the shattered pieces of what was left, and give it some kind of shape.

Almost within the year, Kumar married again.

Vasundhara Shrikhande was Kumar's student just like Bhanumati had been. Her family had been in Calcutta and when they moved to Bombay, Kumar began to teach her. In Kumar's destiny Vasundhara Shrikhande was destined to complete what Bhanumati had prepared and readied for her. Vasundhara Komkali took over at the very spot where Bhanumati had left. She took over Kumar's life, all of it, lock, stock and barrel, readied a life style, a care and a watching which only someone who knew her place in the order of things could have done with the kind of dedication that she brought to bear on Kumar's life. The triumphant years of Kumar's life began with the entry of Vasundhara into it. The readied and fully-provisioned musical universe that Kumar had built breath by breath in bed began to appear in full view. Vasundhara and Kumar sang together very often, the husky soprano of Vasundhara followed Kumar's like *a* shadow lurking beneath unfinished phrases, and appearing suddenly to augment the Tanpura's eloquent silence with a tonal precision that seemed the very breath of the statements Kumar had begun

earlier. It is all there in the records, the long playing discs, in Triveni, the Kabir, Surdas and Mira Bhajans, in Varsha Mangal, Geet Basant and Hemant

The two voices track time and existence with a strange allure and magnificence. The presence of Vasundhara hovers even in the Natya Sangeet Akademi recording entitled "The Way I See Bal Gandharva" where an absent voice seems to be following Kumar's phrases and which gives a new life to the old, time-honoured memories of travelling drama companies of the early years of the twentieth century and the end of the nineteenth. Vasundhara Komkali's principal contribution to music is the way she was able to preserve Kumar intact over the finest years of Kumar's singing life and how the two, husband and wife in tandem, made a mark on the life of the music of the subcontinent. Kumar's impact on music has been so complete and awe-inspiring that when he passed away there was a deafening silence that has not quite left the land. Musical life, in the subcontinent, even after the years that have passed since Kumar, continues to remain in the penumbra of that sudden silence. Kumar's passing on 12 January 1992 gave it a jolt from which it has not quite recovered.

As a new tradition Kumar's inheritance must be considered not an easy task into which to enter wholeheartedly or easily; you cannot enter into the snare of his art at one go. For that approach to music needs more than instruction to learn. While many have tried to learn it they have always been uneasy with it for its sheer consuming impact. Kalapini, the daughter of Vasundhara, could be said to have perhaps got a ringside seat to observe and access her father's life, and is among its significant inheritors. For she had Kumar as a man and father, a life and a teacher added to her mother's careful watching, in addition to the instruction and other guidance that she received from Kumar. Kumar's beloved students, Satyasheel Deshpande and Madhup Mudgal to name just two, and several others who studied under Kumar have been able to learn the art from him and observe the force and impact of his art from the closest quarters but have not yet been able to absorb the secret of the man, which is in fact the essence of his art. For that to occur more time is needed; years sometimes have to pass before the man and his role are fully understood for assimilation. The Bandishes are all there, many in the traditional Ragas like *Thesul Bana Phule* in Bageshri or *Saba Sura Sadhe* in Bhimpalasi, or that tender, moving composition in Darbari that begins *Sundara Mukh Tero.* Kumar's literary penetration was tailored to his art. A poet is not the right person to make a Bandish. There is too much language in a poet and very little of Sur or Raga. The Bandish needs a musician to be born and not a mere poet, equally it is true that in its making it is the poetic sensibility of life which gives life to the Bandish. Kumar's Bandishes exhibit a subtle difference from the traditional Bandishes of Hindustani classical music. There is in them an overall feeling of the presence of a certain literary detail and seeming concern with the logic of the composition which is not found often in older Bandishes that exist mostly as carriers of Raga rather than as the words of the lyric for themselves. Kumar's Bandishes can never be abandoned to the Tala to carry them wherever they might go. Neither is the lyric abandoned to the Raga but is carefully made to answer for its existence in the way it is sung.

For example, consider the Bandish in Yaman, *Mukh Tero Karo.* Nowhere does the Bandish surrender to the Raga completely but takes care to assert its existence as lyric separate from Raga, even if you merely recite its text. Kumar's Bandishes protect their lyrics from being trivialised by any insensitive use of Raga. The play of Raga elaboration

through the many devices of classical music are merely enriched by the lyrics of the Bandish and the words of the lyrics of the Bandish remain sovereign in the performance, never letting the Raga run roughshod over their independent existence. Any number of examples can be found of Kumar's reverence for the words of the Bandish. Take the Shankara that begins, *Sar Pe Dhara Ganga.* Observe the way Kumar elaborates the literary substance of the Bandish without once sacrificing the force of the text for the exigencies of the Raga. The Taans that seem to describe the waves of the flowing river are almost visual in their impact. It is this powerful literary content in Kumar's Bandishes that makes his contribution to Hindustani classical music altogether novel and without an earlier parallel.

* * *

Whether Kumar will produce a Gharana is somewhat difficult to predict; it is not important that he should. For a man who turned his face away from that inheritance it would seem odd that he himself would attract a Gharana after him. The inner principle of Kumar's music was not art but life, and life is not easy to mimic, nor learn, from another. Kumar could not have done it himself. If you do not do it yourself, there is nothing to be done. His internal presence was so powerful that nothing could enter it from outside except what Kumar himself would allow to filter through his own experience of the splendour that is the art of the Raga. He charted a new world in music. It is full of prairies and mountains and hidden lakes, the same that the Pilgrim Fathers found when they landed on Plymouth Rock on the shores of the New World. It needs exploration and has to be claimed as one's own. This needs much more than the ability to sing like Kumar. Kumar himself found it in his journey within himself into the ancient ocean of the Raga whose contours our forebears had described in the lives they had lived. Kumar merely opened a new window that gave another glimpse of a different sky and ocean. That was all.

Postface

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, it would be a good thing to take an audit of the state of Hindustani classical musk. Would it have made any difference to Hindustani classical music if Kumar Gandharva had not been born into it at the time he did? If we asked ourselves this the answer would be similar to the one if you were asked what difference would it have made if the great Adi Shankara of Kaladi had not been born a thousand four hundred years or thereabouts ago to Sanatana Dharma. It was the same when Albert Einstein entered the world of Gravity. And if you asked what was it that he really gave the world. It certainly was not just the bomb. The answer would not be easy however, considering how long it took Physics itself to accept him and shed those older beliefs about God taking seven days to make the world and resting on the seventh, and that marvellous Newtonian reliability of all mechanical systems. Classical Physics took phenomena sequentially and worked at it one piece after another in a straight line. Einstein, on the other hand, worked at the phenomenal world along its breadth, ignoring length; it was an altogether new direction of inquiry. It was the approach along the

breadth that flummoxed people and turned their stomachs. Later when they discovered that what Einstein had found was as easy as pie, all it required was the demolition of a lot of preconceived biases and culturally associated convictions. Then it became possible to receive the simple truths that he had found in order to accept him.

Kumar, too, in a certain sense worked on the breadth of Hindustani classical music and not along its length. The principal value to mankind of such intrusions into its customary state of stupor is that their entry helps to expand the database of life. They add new approaches, new understandings, and sometimes these results in a brand new awakening. They also help us to understand that almost anything that we think as known today can pass from us and a new angle and a new finding can be discovered which will change a great deal of the world as we now know it, into brand new, magical shapes and configurations.

Before Kumar Gandharva the Gharanas were like the buoys you find scattered in the oceans from which airliners flying over them in the sky take the grid and read their positions *vis-à-vis* the land masses they might be approaching. Kumar suddenly showed Hindustani musicians that while the Gharana was a marvellous institutional device and of the greatest help in a journey in the art, what he pointed out also was that it is at best a landing on the staircase, a good place to rest when you are tired from the climbing. But it is only the beginning.

Musicians normally live very lonely lives, shut off with their Tanpuras figuring out the vast expanses of the inner landscapes of their lives in their Ragas and Bandishes. Gharanas give the musicians an opportunity to socialise; to compare stylistic devices, voices, textures, mannerisms vocal and linguistic, and the many other issues that musicians gossip about when not engaged in the practice of their art. Above all, the tradition of the Gharanas give musicians a vocabulary to talk music, for your true life easier. It was this new element that Kumar Gandharva introduced into Hindustani classical music that for the first time produced an alternative route, an underpass that skirts the main highway but which reaches you home as surely as the old well-worn track of the Guru-Shishya Parampara. The new century of Hindustani classical music that began with the new millennium will need to study this remarkable man and the path he forged towards this finding which has always been the true search in the art.

It is a novel approach and demands power, presence, a quality of inner silence and certain special qualities of character in the student who will search for this new path. It cannot be done easily, or mechanically, or from books, however capable and gifted a student may be. It lies in the sadness of a breaking away from roots that actually belong to us but not having been truly claimed never become our right to possess, and it is the undertaking of a journey like those Pilgrim Fathers did, when they fitted out two ships and went into the empty blue of the Atlantic and found a verdant land beyond the horizon. The journey once begun never truly ends. It is to the end of every life that this journey is directed. What it needs are courage and a rapt belief.

Glossary

Abhanga is a religiously inspired musical form and is commonly sung in Maharashtra. The three saints, Namadeva, Tukaram and Eknath were the original composers of the

abhanga form. It shares certain characteristics with the Kirtana of the Carnatic School. The Maharashtra rulers of Tanjore made abhangas popular in the south.

Achala Swara is the unmoving note. There are two such notes on the Indian scale. These are the SHADJA, which is the tonic note, and its fifth, the PANCHAMA swara. They are the same as the *Do* and So of the solfege. These notes have no sharps or flats to them.

Akar is a Hindustani word and means the vowel Aa used as text for singing.

Alap is called Alapana in Carnatic music. It consists of improvised melody figures that slowly reveal a RAGA.

Anga literally means a limb or a part. In music it refers to a style such as RAGA anga, THUMRI anga and tappa anga. The anga in RAGA anga would be used to indicate the root to which a given RAGA might belong. Anga also refers to the two tetrachords the lower or the poorvang and the upper or the uttarang. It could also denote one of the divisions of musical time. There are six angas: dhruta, anudruta, guru, laghu, pluta, and kaka pada.

Antara. The second movement of a composition or BANDISH.

Aroha (Arohana) is a series of notes in the ascending order of pitch in a RAH A. Arohanatwa is the ascending state of a RAGA in Alap, where its scale is still to ascend and explore the upper reaches of the *RAGA* scale.

Avaroha (Avarohana, Avarohi) is the descending scale of notes of a RAGA.

Avarta is a time cycle that begins and returns to its original starting point, of a TALA.

Bandish is a composition that is defined as bound. These are normally composed in Brijbhasha, Bhojpuri or other dialects of the Hindi heartland. In a Bandish, space is provided for musical elaboration through a felicitous selection of vowel sounds. A poem is not a 13andish even if it can be bound by TALA, for its structure is complete in itself and does not need musical elaboration for enrichment. Thus, poets do not compose Bandishes, musicians do. The instrumental compositions of Gats are also loosely called Bandish.

Besura means apaswara or out of tune.

Bhajan is any tune that has n devotional quality. The words are adorative of deities and tell of the myths associated with them. Mira, Tulsidas and Kabir are the principal Bhajan composers whose lyrics are sung in Hindustani music.

Bhakti means devotion. In Indian classical music, it is also a tradition.

Bol literally means a phrase of music in words or mnemonics with the rhythmic solfa syllables of TALA like *dha dhin dha.* In Carnatic music this is referred to as Jati or solkattu.

Boltaan are improvised figures in TAAN of varying speeds which are multiples of the basic tempi used widely in KHYAL compositions.

Chilla is a voluntary discipline with spiritual and transformative effects; it is a custom in Hindustani music tradition. A musician isolates himself and practises his art ill seclusion. Usually this isolation in ritual terms lasts forty (chilla) days but is practised for varying periods by those who enter the world of music with all their strength and life. The vow is taken before a Fir in a graveyard or before the Mazaar of a Muslim saint.

Daad is a Persian word; it means the appreciation of value. It is an expression of appreciation of the spirit of a performance.

Dattilam is a fourth century text on music authored by Dattila, an acknowledged authority on matters musical.

Dhaivat is the sixth note in the scale of swaras.

Durbar is a janya raga of the twenty-third melakarta, Karaharapriya.

Gamaka is a grace or an ornament and is used to arid and enrich musical expression.

Gandhara is the third note in the Indian scale.

Gayaki is a singing style. It is used to express the style of instrumentalists who play as though the instrument is singing.

Gharana is a kind of affiliation to a style of voice and singing and literary understanding of an identifiable kind. Gharanas usually carry the name of the place of its original progenitor, or the name of the man who first introduced that style.

Ghazal is a form of Urdu poetry that is often sung. The first couplet of this form is called Matla and the finishing couplet is called Makta. The remaining couplets are called Misra and ANTARA. Each couplet of a Ghazal is complete in itself and does not need the others to complete its meaning, or to expand it.

Grantha. Any authoritative classical text.

Guru is one of the six Angas (limbs) of Carnatic music. It has two MATKAS or eight Akshara Kalas.

This word also means preceptor, one who lakes the student from darkness to light; *Gu* means darkness and *Ru* to remove.

Guru-Shishya Parampara indicates a tradition (Parampara) or lineage of preceptors. It is the tradition transmitting the art through a preceptor (Guru) to a student (Shishya).

Harmonium is a portable organ-like instrument that has bellows which are pumped using the hands or feet. Its scale is tempered.

Jalad means quick. It is a tempo that is double the measure of the MAUHYA LAVA or four times the measure of the VILAMBIT LAYA.

Jhaptal is a ten metre cycle TALA. It has unequal sections divided into two or three or two and three units of MATKAS. The first MATRA is the SAM, the third is the first beat after the SAM, the sixth is the empty KHALI beat and the eighth is the third beat of the cycle.

Katha Kalakshepam (Hari Katha Kalakshepam) is another form of kalakshepam or passing time. Katha added to the term implies spending time telling stories. These are the stories of the Pauranas told through songs sung in dramatic fashion with power and resource. The *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharala*, and *Bhagavatam* form the basis of the stories and anecdotes that are sung and recited by the kalakshepam performers. Tanjaore Krishna Bhagavatar is described as the father of Katha Kalashepam (1847-1903).

Kehrva is a TALA of four beats, the BOL for which is *dhagi nn dhinaki dhina.*

Khali is a particular beginning of a division in a TALA cycle in which there: is no stress or accent on the' beat. It is usually described by a wave of the hand.

Khatka is a grace which in a two-note span, gives edge, sharpness and speed to the figure. It forms part of the triad — khatka, MUKKI, and gitkari. Based on the SWAKA *Set,* for example, a khatka will be *Sa Ni Ri Sa*

Khyal is a vocal composition in which ordinarily there are two movements called the STHAYI and the AMTARA and is built by a series of improvisational stages using ALAP BOI.-ALAP, BOLTAANS and TAANS and Sargams which are solfa passages.

Kriti is one of the most highly evolved forms of musical composition in the Carnatic School. Every composer in the Carnatic School has attempted to compose kritis and contributed richly to this form of music. Literally, 'kri' means fulfilment, meaning 'him that does'. Kritis form the bulk of musical compositions in Carnatic music today. Unlike the KHYAL in Hindustani music, the kriti is a fully composed piece of music, complete in its architecture and motion. Its value lies in its musical content while its sahitya is relatively unimportant. The kriti has three movements; the Pallavi, the Anupallavi and the Charanam. There could be more than one charanam. The kritis are ornamented with several technics) devices such as chitta swaras, madhytimakala sahitya, swarakshara sangatis, solkattu swaras, swara sahitya and so on.

Laya is tempi or speed in which a composition is sung or played.

Madhya Laya is the medium tempi of a performance.

Madhyama is the fourth note of the scale of Indian music.

Matra is a unit of time measure and is used as the basic unit of the 108 TALAS of Indian music. (See *Tala)*

Meend is a glide from one SWAKA to another without touching the intermediate notes.

Mukhda literally means face and applies to the face or die upper part of the right half (Dayan) of the TAHLA. It also refers to the first few words of a composition leading on to its SAM. This phrase is naturally used every time the ANTARA over and it is this by which a composition is recognised. It is found in all kinds of compositions — the BHAJAK, the TIIUMKI and the BANDISH. It is also called Muh. Well-known compositions are referred to by their MUKHUAS.

Murki is a short sharp figure of two or three notes so uttered that it occurs within the space of a half MAIKA. This figure has decorative power and is also known as phanda or gitkari.

Nada is a sound of a musical quality but with metaphysical implications in its meaning.

Nirgun literally means without attributes. This is a characteristic approach to life popularised by the saint Kabir who approaches God as formless and without any attributes describable in words. Kabir and his followers, who are called Kabir Panthees, propagated this approach to God and creation as a manifestation of this One without parts.

Nishada is the seventh note of the scale.

Pakad. Recognisable melodic phrase that identifies a RAGA. Literally it means to hold or clutch.

Panchama is the fifth note of the scale. It is an ACHALA SWARA and in any given scale docs not have a sharp or flat variation. It is a note that traditionally is believed to be the sound of the Indian *Koel*.

Parampara generally means tradition; in Indian classical music, a distinctive tradition.

Raga is a scale of notes which has a minimum of five notes and has characteristic ascent and descent. It may have a dissimilar set of notes for ascent and descent. Principally it has an emotional colour which characterises the RAGA.

Ratnakara is a thirteenth century document authored by Sarangadeva. Hindustani music is based largely on this GKANTHA. There are four major adhyayas or chapters in the first part to this book: Swaradhyay, Raga. Vivekadhyay, Prabandhadhyay and Taladhyay. The second part of the GRANTHA is divided into Vadyadhyay and Nartanadhyay.

Rishabha is the second note of the scale of Indian music. Rishabha means bull. In the musical scale the SHADIA which is the tonic note is the symbol of the creator-destroyer Lord Shiva.

Sadhana is a word commonly used to indicate practice and is popularly misused in this sense. Sadhana is directed towards a spiritual objective, and uses music as a medium to transform the inner nature of the musician so that after a prolonged period of Sadhana the musician’s art acquires a power and lustre that seem incalculable. While practice in the ordinary sense is a mechanical exercise, Sadhana is a creative endeavour.

Sam is the first MATRA or beat of a TALA cycle. It is a stressed MATRA and is the concluding rest point of the cycle.

Samvadi comes from the Sanskrit root *vaad*, which means to speak together or hold a dialogue. This is a note in the scale of a RAGA which is separate from the VAUI by four or five notes. The Samvadi's status m a KACA is equal to that of the VADI.

Sangeet is a term that has two parts: 'san' which is derived from 'sam' and 'geet' 'Sam' means together and 'geet' moans a song. It also connotes material for singing.

Saptak is the series of notes that forms the musical scale. This has seven notes and hence the name.

Shadja is the very first note of the Indian scale. This note therefore becomes the tonic note and is an ACHALA SWARA. Its nature includes all the various techniques of voice production using head and chest and dental, humming and sinus notes. It is called shadja as its has all the succeeding six notes of the scale incipient within it and one of the techniques of SWARA SADHANA is intended to make it possible for the practitioner to produce six distinct positions within that single note.

Shehnai is a clarinet kind of wind instrument somewhat like the nagaswaram of the Carnatic system and is played in a celebratory vein. Its sound is deemed to be auspicious.

Shruti constitutes the microtonal intervals between notes. The word Shruti is made up of two parts: *shru* meaning to hear, and *tina* which means to involve or use. Any sound that is audible is a Shruti and the Indian musical scale has twenty-two Shrutis. The seven notes haw innumerable Shrutis, several of which are difficult to identify except in an emotional or a psychological sense. While mathematical positioning of these notes can be done, the linguistic basis of Indian music makes these microtonal intervals a part of the language and its utterance in speech. The twenty-two Shrutis are: Siddha, Prabhavati, Kantha, Suprabha, Shikha, Diptimati, Ugra, Hladi, Nirviri, Dira, Sarphara, Kashanti, Hridayonmulini, Visarini, Prasuna, Vibhuti, Malini, Chapala, Vala, Sarvaratna, Sitantaj and Vikalini.

Shishya means a disciple. *Shish* means to punish, thus indicating the punishingly difficult period of a student's life.

Sthayi is the opening movement of a BANDISH.

Swam is inadequately described as a note. In actual fact the Swara is more than that. While a note is an instrumental or mechanical sound, the Swara is always a human

utterance. Instrumentalists, when playing Swaras, have to be specially trained to produce the imitation of a vocal sound. The word has its roots in Sanskrit in which *swa* stands for self and *ra* stands for shining forth. Thus it is a sound in which the self must reveal itself. RACAS, thus, are not made from notes but from Swaras.

Taan is the word that describes certain musical figures in which the notes have designs and patterns that grow at various speeds. An arpeggio of Western music would be a Taan in Indian classical music. There are two major classifications of Taans: Shuddha Taan and Koot Taan. There are 49 Shuddha Taans and 5,048 Koot Taans possible. The names of the various Taan types are Shuddha or Sapat, Mishra Taan, Phirat Ki Taan, Chhoot Taan, Jabre Ki Taan and Halak Ki Taan.

Tabla is the most popular percussion instrument of Hindustani music. It consists of a pair of drums, of which one is the treble (Dayan or right) and the other the bass (Bayan or left). Together they produce a fine texture of sound. All forms of Hindustani classical music use the Tabla other than the Dhrupad and the Dhammar which use the Pakhawaj. The basic tonic note is tuned on the right drum and the left is tuned to an octave below.

Tala is not rhythm though often loosely described as such in English. It is part of language and the spoken cadences of poetry. It is defined in terms of MATKAS in repeating cycles of beats that expand to a stressed point called the SAM down to a release point called KHALI. Some well-known and commonly used TALAS are Aditala, Chautal, Dadra, Deepchandi, Dhammar, Ektal, Jhumra, Jhaptal, Kehrwa, Rupak, Sulfakta or Sultala, Sawari, Tintala.

Tanpura is a drone instrument with four strings, three of steel and the fourth of brass. This is the basic and the most vital of Indian classical musical instruments. This instrument is tuned usually to the tonic and its fourth, fifth, or even the seventh.

Tara Saptak is the highest of the three vocal registers.

Tara Shadja is the eighth note of the scale.

Tarana is a composition using mnemonics, which are meaningless syllables that extrapolate a RAGA and produce rhythmic delight. As the letters used in them have no meaning, the technique serves only a rhythmic purpose. Syllables Tana, Dir, Dani, Tadani and Persian syllables, Alayi Ilia, and several other like Nom Tom and so on are frequently used.

Thaat is the name given to the RAGAS which Pandit Vishnu Narayan Bhatkhande selected out of the seventy Melakartas of the Carnatic system. Thaats constitute the main

RAGAS from which all others are derived. There are ten Thaats based on the Venkatmukhi approach which is now universally accepted in Hindustani classical music. These Thaats have the names of RACAS and the ten are: Bilawal, Khamaj, Poorvi, Kafi, Bhairavi, Kalyan, Bhairav, Marwa, Asavari, and Todi.

Tilwada is a TALA of sixteen MATRAS divided into four equal sections. The first beat is the SAM. The second beat is on the fifth MATRA, the ninth is the empty beat or the KHALI and the final beat is on the thirteenth MATRA.

Thumri is a highly popular light classic composition. Like BANDISH, Thumri is composed in dialects of Hindi language. Among the styles of Thumri singing, the Punjabi (from Punjab) and the Lucknavi (from Lucknow) are the most predominant. The Thumri is often sung in the Punjabi tala, a kind of TINTALA. There are several RAGAS in which Thumris are sung and a Thumri's delicacy and appeal are obtained by a judicious mix of RAGAS.

Tihai is the technique that repeats a phrase three times to the accented beat of a TALA cycle. The division of any TALA into three equal parts to conclude a variation is called Tihayi.

Tintala is the most popular TALA in Hindustani music and there are a large number of compositions in this TALA. It has sixteen MATRAS with beats on the first, fifth and thirteenth MATRA; while KHALI is on the ninth MATRA.

Vadi is a word that has its root in the Sanskrit word *vad* which means to speak. It is a note in the scale of a RAGA that is evocative and produces the feeling of the RAGA. It is usually positioned in the lower tetra-chord and has its consonant note in the upper tetra-chord called the SAMVADI. Together, both constitute points of tension and intensity on the RAGA scale and play a pivotal role in making a RAGA come alive.

Vairagya is the psychological state of detachment from worldly concerns. It is the state of mind of one who has developed a certain distance from the ordinary attachments that bedevil existence. In music it is a kind of performance which the singer himself does not participate in the evocative content of his music but is able to produce star responses in his listeners.

Vilambit means slow tempi, usually twice or four times less than the standard medium tempi.

End